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dēsigned

*New England's first publication
for the South Asian diaspora*

dēsi

Desi is the ethnonym of the people, cultures, and products of the Indian subcontinent and their diaspora. The term is derived from the Sanskrit word *deśā*, meaning ‘land or country’ and hence, *desi* means ‘of the homeland.’ It signifies a deep connection to the motherland—the ancient cultures, traditions, and identities that transcend the bounds of modern geopolitical borders, unconstrained by any single nationality, language, or religion.

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The nomenclature is endonymic: that is, a self-appellation. It traces its origin specifically to the nations of Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Pakistan; however, in recent years, it has been more widely used across South Asia, comprising Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

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South Asia is more than a geopolitical center for colonial power: it is a diverse confluence of rich cultural exchange and shared traditions across nationalities and regions. *desi-gned* is an exploration of the unbelievable vibrancy of art, design, and culture from the subcontinent, curated and created by a group of students that identify as South Asian.

This publication was created within the colonial structures of *Brown University* and *Rhode Island School of Design* — institutions that are located on the ancestral and contemporary homelands of the *Narragansett*, *Wampanoag*, and *Nipmuc* Nations. In studying and thinking about art and design in English and within a dominant Western European academic tradition, we legitimize a global colonial power structure. These institutions and industries are responsible for many injustices, both past and ongoing, that include slavery and race prejudice.

We are committed to work together to honor this past and build a future that champions greater acknowledgment, accessibility, and inclusivity towards peoples and perspectives from all cultures, backgrounds, and traditions.

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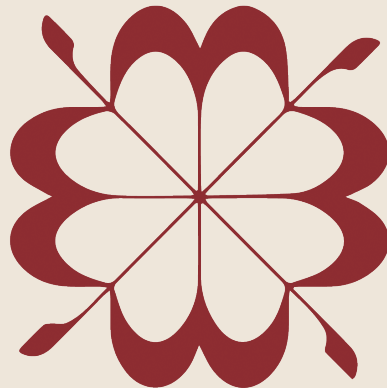
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This pattern is a marriage of the traditions of *kolam* (floor murals made using rice powder) from the South and *jali* (Arabic-inspired stone curtains that are carved into arches and windows) from the North—the two most dominant aesthetic cultures from South Asia that comprise a multitude of sub-cultures and identities.



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Special thanks to Douglass Scott and Jennifer Liese for the innumerable hours of their time advising us on design and publishing.

Editor's Note

The twenty-first century shoulders the weight of defining the contemporary. As a compelling necessity of the modern era, where societies and cultures tend to be reduced to derivations of the past, it is our responsibility to unearth both the ubiquitous and the hidden.

The first issue of *desi-gned* memorialized untold stories of South Asia's rich heritage. Now, it is our challenge to reinterpret and recontextualize omnipresent fragments of the contemporary. New England embodies an array of connections to the places we call home. These traces of South Asia herald the need to transcend the geographical boundaries of our homelands. It lives and breathes in every street and corner.

How does a queer Bangladeshi immigrant recall undocumented histories? How does the experience of a tortilla differ from that of a roti? What would it be like to taste and smell South Asian textiles encountered in a museum case?

In this issue, we bring latent stories—stories that exist around us but haven't yet been materialized—to the forefront. We retrieve stories that challenge existing notions of cultural artifacts

that often aren't institutionally recognized and archive them into a worldwide repertoire of curious dialogue.

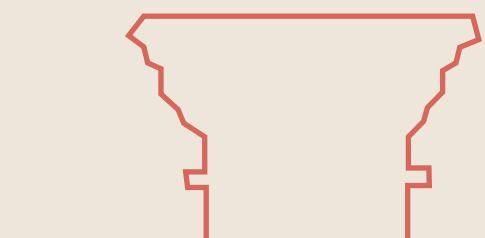
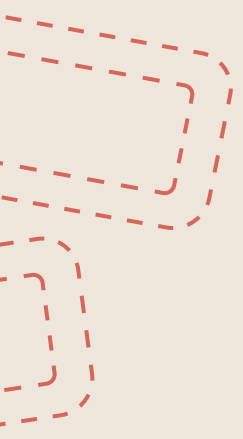
For us, exploration, discovery, and a convergence of "Wait What!" moments serve as essential pathways to traverse the critical themes enshrined within our perceptions of South Asia. As we investigate both tangible objects and cultural histories, we are posed with questions of what is, in fact, *contemporary* in South Asian stories.

From an extant romance of the past to a powerful belonging to the present...

Happy Discovering,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Harsh Thakkar". The signature is fluid and stylized, with the first name "Harsh" and last name "Thakkar" clearly legible.

Harsh Thakkar



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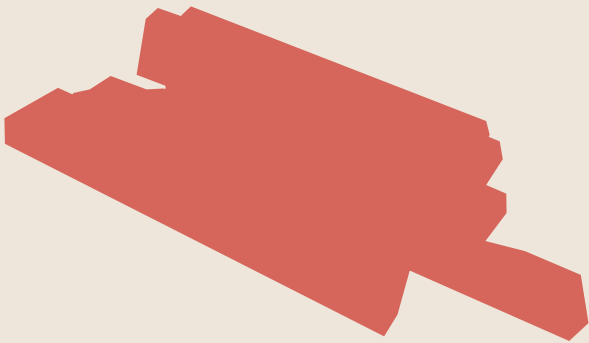
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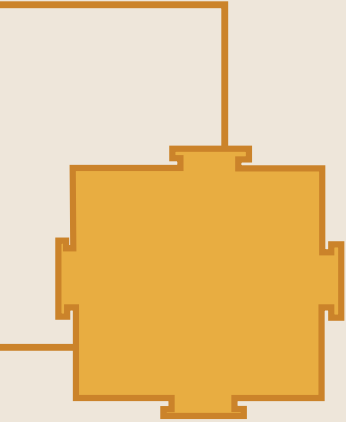
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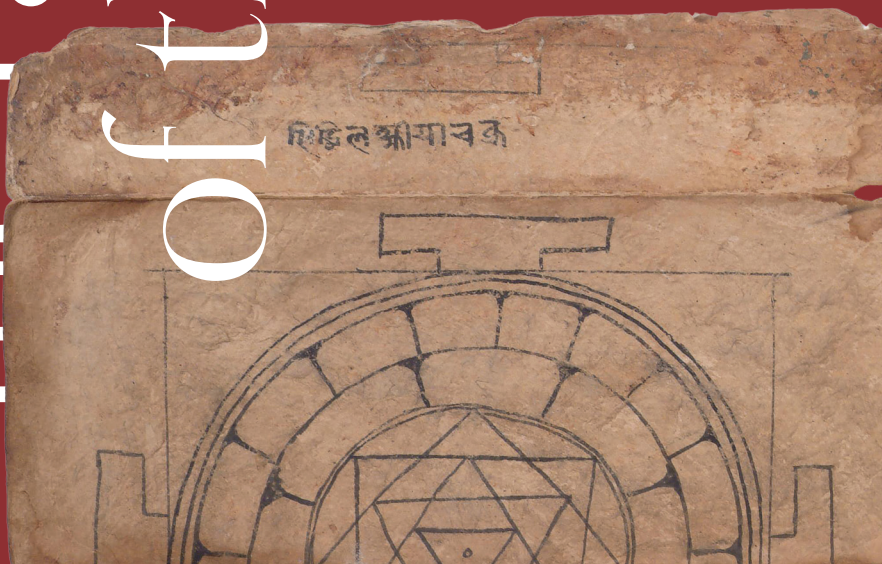
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Written by Hrishita Acharya
Designed by Sejal Gupta

Vastu - The Fabric of the Home

*Tantric Ritual Manual
with Purusa-cakra, 17th
century, Nepalese, colors
and ink on paper.
Image Credit: Philadel-
phia Museum of Art*





Vastu Shastra (noun)

Sanskrit: वास्तु शास्त्र

Consists of two words:

Vastu (pronounced vāstu, where the macron above the vowel stretches its pronunciation), which means ‘dwelling’; the root word is ‘vas’, which means ‘to dwell’ or ‘to stay.’

Shastra (pronounced shāstra) means ‘science’ or ‘scientific treatment of a subject.’

There are two variations of *Vastu*.

The first, *Vāstu*, refers to the house as an architectural base, which, with creative intervention, becomes *Vāstū* (with an elongated vowel ‘u’), a home believed to be fit for the gods.

Vastu Shastra is thus the Hindu science of architecture. Evidence of it has been found across diverse regions of India, predominantly in Sanskrit, serving as a conceptual frame for technical, geographical, and contextual adaptations. It provides guidelines around various construction considerations, including orientation, spaces, layout, and materials—usually with an emphasis on balance and symmetry. Vastu Shastra postulates that the elements of nature (fire, water, earth, air and space) and the energy of a space are connected like the warp and weft on a loom. It seeks to achieve harmony between the two for the well-being of the inhabitants.

Deeply rooted in Hindu beliefs and mythology, Vastu principles seamlessly integrate stories of the gods from ancient Hindu texts like the Vedas and Puranas. One of the most infamous applications of Vastu Shastra is in orientation and layout. Vastu prescribes specific orientations for structures based on their purpose and bases the layout on the relationship between the elements and directions. These links were created based on the myth of the *Vastu Purusha*, a primordial man that Brahma, the god of creation, made while building the universe.

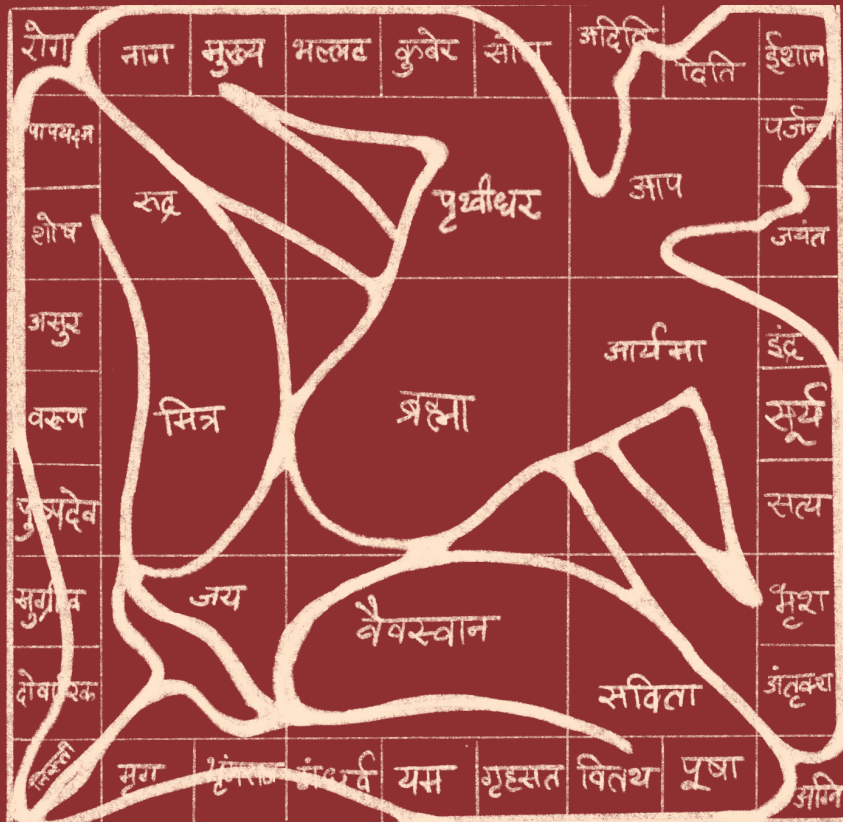
The Vastu Purusha's appetite grew as uncontrollably as he did, and he ate whatever caught his attention until he eventually cast an eclipse on the Earth. It took the strength of forty-five gods to pin Vastu Purusha down on the earth before he would devour the universe. Brahma held him down at the center while the other gods grabbed his limbs, with his head facing the northeast and legs in the southwest. The space occupied by the Vastu Purusha constructed a grid, with different gods occupying specific sections of it, each with their own purpose, qualities, and connected elements. Thus, this lattice, known as the *Vastu Purusha Mandala*, became a framework to allocate functions to parts of the site according to the god and elements associated with the section for harmony and well-being. For instance, the southeast is the area of *Agni*, the god of fire. A kitchen or fireplace would bring growth and prosperity, while having a washroom or water-well would not. A *mandala* literally translates to 'circle' in Sanskrit, and yet the form of the Vastu Purusha Mandala is square.

This can be explained by looking into vedic sacrificial altars, where a round altar symbolized the terrestrial world and a square symbolized the celestial. The square is a perfect and final form; unlike the circle, it is rigid and unmoving, unaffected by time (which is believed to be circular/cyclical in Hinduism). Hence, the Vastu Purusha is pressed into a square.

Prana, which is the Sanskrit word for 'vital force' or 'the life-sustaining energy of all beings', holds great significance in the framework of Vastu. According to the discipline, forces come from the east as sunlight and from the north as the earth's magnetic forces. Free flow of this energy through a space fosters its inhabitants' holistic health and well-being, and balancing it is tied back to the Vastu Purusha Mandala and the five elements. For instance, the center of the house, where Brahma holds the Vastu Purusha

by the navel, is the heart of the house, usually used as a courtyard or *aangan* in many homes. The *aangan* serves as a central gathering area for inhabitants, allowing for strengthened connections and socialisation. Moreover, it offered centralized ventilation and flow of air, as well as a clear view of the sun and the sky. Often, one finds a *tulsi*, a holy basil

plant, in the middle of the *aangan*, evidence of the elements of the earth and water as well. The *aangan* is a way for traditional architectural practice to incorporate the various aspects of vastu shastra, creating a healthy and balanced environment that serves people's physical and psychological well-being.





An imbalance in the energy of a space is called a *Vastu Dosh*. Dosh means 'defect' or 'flaw' in Sanskrit. These are caused by architectural and design flaws in the spatial arrangements of rooms, furniture, and other elements such as windows and passages. Blocked spaces or even inappropriate color choices obstruct the flow of energy. Vastu dictates that these flaws have a negative impact on the energy and inhabitants of a space.

As per the modern understanding of Vastu, this could manifest as stress, financial instability, and recurring health issues, among other problems. Just as each thread adds to the strength and beauty of a tapestry, alignment of all the elements of Vastu is essential for the holistic well-being of inhabitants. Postcolonial urban planning in India has left most city-dwellers with apartment and bungalow-style housing more aligned with modern architectural styles. Contemporary *Vastukars*, or Vastu practitioners, offer services to neutralize the dosh, including *Vastu Puja*, a prayer ceremony.



Tantric Ritual Manual with Purusa-cakra,
17th century, Nepalese, colors and ink on paper.
Image Credit: Philadelphia Museum of Art

Nivaran means 'to prevent or ward off;' *Yantra* means 'instrument.' *Vastu Dosh Nivaran Yantra* is a remedial measure that one can use to balance out the negativity caused by *Vastu Dosh*. They are made of metals like copper and alloys such as brass or *ashtadhatu* (a combination of eight metals that is considered pure and decay-proof). Yantras employ geometric shapes and patterns that hold symbolic meaning, using basic forms like triangles, as the pyramid yantra does to repel negativity. The triangles represent the Holy Trinity of gods in the Hindu belief, or the balance between the divine feminine and masculine energies in some contexts. Squares, which represent stability and balance, are also found in the form.

Sometimes, yantras can be found buried in the foundation or in the walls of a construction, included from the beginning as a preventive measure. More often now, they are hung or placed in appropriate positions and orientations to serve their purpose. To some extent, they provide a visual placebo effect for the inhabitants to feel more secure and safe in their spaces.

Vastu Shastra is not only limited to the home. Vastu is believed to elevate any architectural site, be it a house, temple, city, living room, office, or garden. The theory provides a comprehensive foundation that can be applied at various scales, impacting individuals, and communities. At a grander scale, public structures (including temples like the Brihadishvara Temple in Thanjavur and Surya Temple in Konark) and public spaces (including the cities of Jaipur and Madurai) have been constructed using Vastu Shastra. It is interesting to note the social norms and structures that emerge through the study of public architecture and urban planning.

For instance, cities were traditionally built around temples and royal architecture, primarily to establish these structures as the seat of power and authority. Building around the temple also signifies its role as the spiritual heart of the city, where people gather for worship, rituals, and festivals. The rest of the city was sectioned into zones based on the directions' associational values. For example, the southeast section would be reserved for those who work with fire, like blacksmiths and jewellery makers. According to architect and historian Vibhuti Sachdev, "The objective of bunching certain functions and professions together was to allow the sharing of infrastructure facilities such as kilns and tanneries, and thereby to promote in the community a sense of shared responsibility." However, such structuring raises questions of who is left on the outskirts.

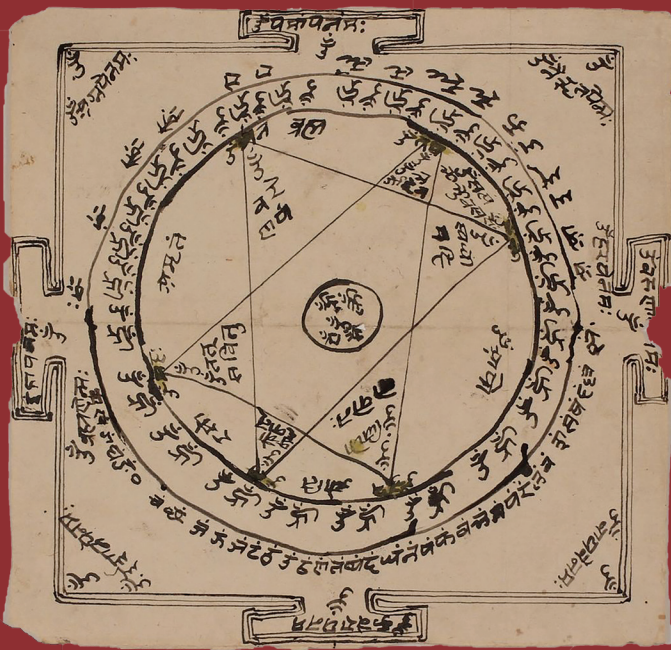
Organized hierarchically, one's relative position to the center influenced access to resources and social opportunities. This spatial separation may have contributed to disparities in wealth, status, and opportunity among different sections of the population as they interacted in the broader urban landscape. In an interview with Aditya Bhattacharjee, professor of History, Philosophy and Social Sciences with a focus on Religious Studies at RISD, he discussed how political and theological ideas are built into the architecture as well: the *Shikhara*, literally translated to 'mountain peak' in Sanskrit, is the tower-like structure that houses the inner sanctum of Hindu temples.



Laghu-Shyama Yantra with a Pentagram in the Centre, 18th century, Rajasthan, gouache on paper. Image Credit: The National Museum, New Delhi

Its height is an allusion to *Meru*, a mountain on which the gods are said to reside, and its step-like structure is a metaphorical climb to spirituality. The wider base represents the common people, and the steps to the narrow summit represent an ascent to more knowledge and growth, the highest level of existence. However, it also reflects the fact that there is a singular authority in the civil structure of the city, one king who is akin to the gods, and serves as an indicator of the value of such hierarchy in society. This form of social structure allowed India to thrive in its early conception, and with the growth of transoceanic trade in the age of empires and kings, India became a template of sophisticated civilization for neighboring kingdoms.

Flourishing at the time, East Indian kingdoms, like Kalinga (modern-day Odisha) and Gauda (modern-day Bengal), became major centres of economic and cultural trade, and concepts of Vastu shastra seem to have made their way across the ocean from here. Angkor Wat, a Hindu Buddhist temple in Cambodia and the largest religious structure in the world. It exhibits certain features that could be interpreted as Vastu compliant. The temple's orientation towards the cardinal directions, notably with its main entrance facing west, aligns with Vastu's emphasis on directional harmony. Additionally, the symmetrical layout of Angkor Wat, characterized by balanced structures and galleries, echoes Vastu principles promoting equilibrium and positive energy flow and reflects a reverence for sacred geometry.



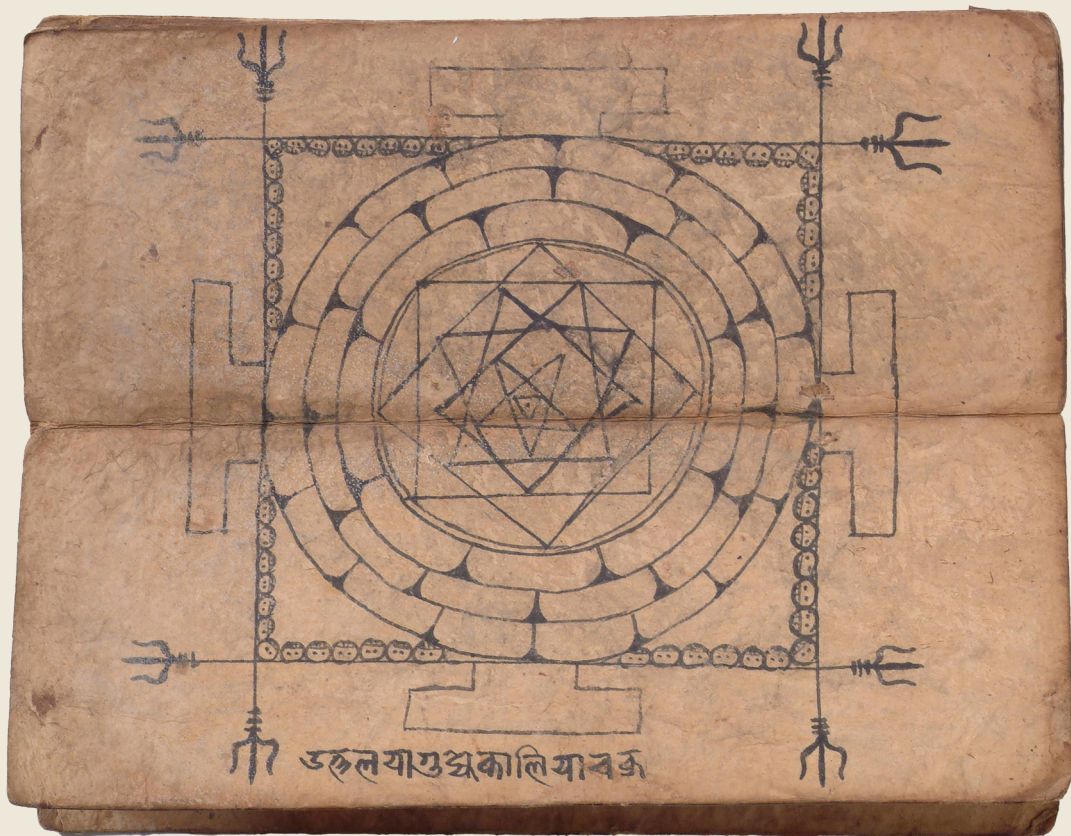
Manuscript depicting
Yantra. Image Credit:
Alexander Gorlizki

While it is uncertain if Angkor Wat was built with Vastu Shastra principles in mind, especially since the practice was codified after its construction, it reflects the principles of Vastu better than some Hindu temples in India do. If one were to speculate, it is likely that, with no visual or experiential aid, architects may have been borrowing knowledge from texts and learnings exchanged through trade between kingdoms—or from travelling artists, designers, and teachers, and were more likely to follow the system more literally in order to replicate the grand Hindu temples in India.

Delving into the intricacies of Vastu Shastra reveals its profound connections to India's cultural and aesthetic tapestry. At its core lies a spiritual foundation anchored in Hindu philosophy and mythology, honing in on the concept of interconnectedness. When considering religion as a protoscience, a way of understanding the world, Vastu Shastra becomes the science that pairs affect and emotion with

space and matter in a profound and entangled way. Akin to other Indian cultural exports like *yoga* and *ayurveda*, Vastu Shastra approaches architecture and design holistically. It considers matters of aesthetics and visual design as well as physical, psychological, and spiritual well-being to create spaces that embody harmony and balance.

Tantric Hindu Ritual Manual, 17th Century, Nepalese, watercolor on paper. Image Credit: Philadelphia Museum of Art



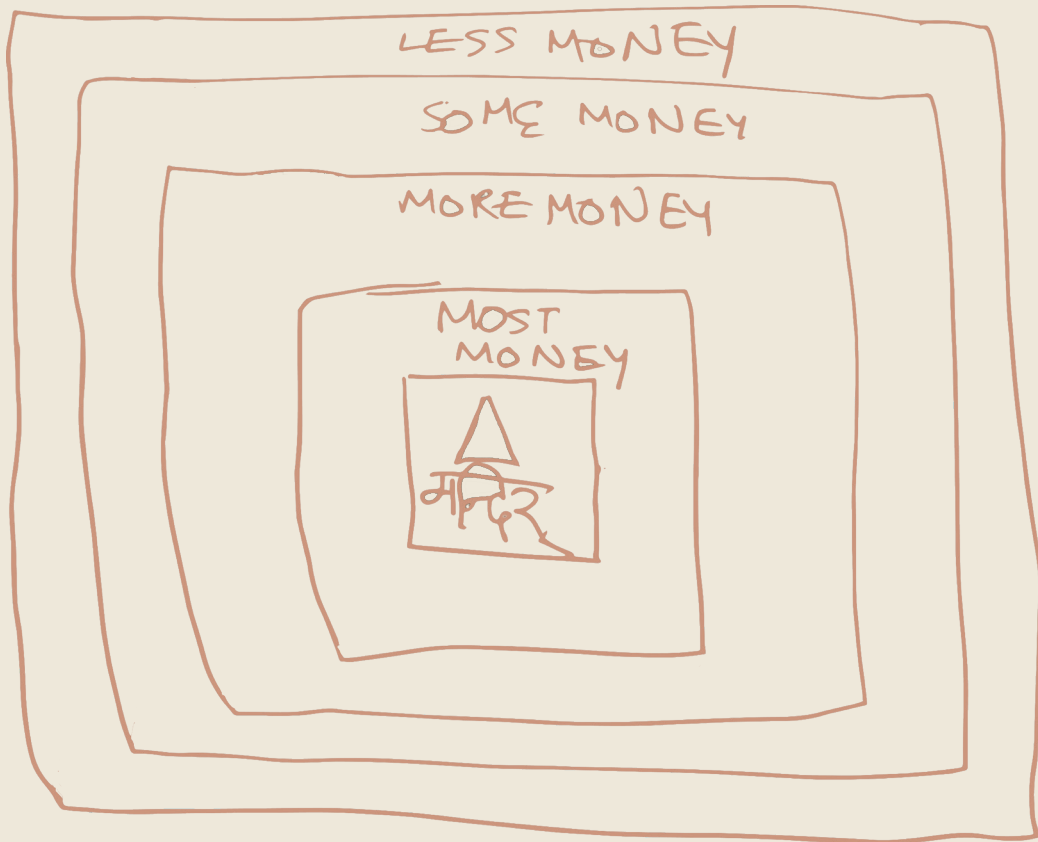


Diagram by Aditya Bhattacharjee,
2024, ink on paper. Image Credit:
Hrishita Acharya

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With this perspective, architects can design more than just the space; they design experience and community in the space. Vastu Shastra beautifully layers culturally significant stories, symbols and imagery, like the mandala, to drive this purpose. In the same vein as other Indian traditions, Vastu Shastra has historically been passed down through generations, fostering a sense of cultural continuity and communal identity.

Vastu echoes collectivist goals—aiming not just for the well-being of individuals, but of society as a whole, highlighting a sense of interconnectedness between people, nature, and our environment. Recognizing that spaces build ecosystems, the discipline aligns architecture with natural elements and environmental considerations to promote sustainability, connection, and an appreciation for the entangled web of life.



CITY OF
PROVIDENCE



Stories of Iron

*Written by Dway Lunkad
Designed by Radhika Chauhan*

Dasnagar, Howrah India

In 2024, if one ever visits Dasnagar, in the Howrah district of West Bengal, they will be welcomed by a burgeoning city—not too dissimilar from Providence. The outskirts have a thickness to the air thick, with a bitter aftertaste of iron. There are plumes of smoke and big steel warehouses with metal foundries. There, skilled workers have been working there to produce cast iron pans, metal fences, automotive parts, manhole covers, and other goods for the last 50 years. Of the 300 foundries in West Bengal, 95% are in the

Howrah district, with some of them dating back to the 19th century. However, this was not always the case. The Howrah district has changed the landscape of West Bengal in the last 100 years. As part of the colonial expedition in British-India, the South Asian subcontinent was divided into three presidencies: Bombay, Madras, and Kolkata.

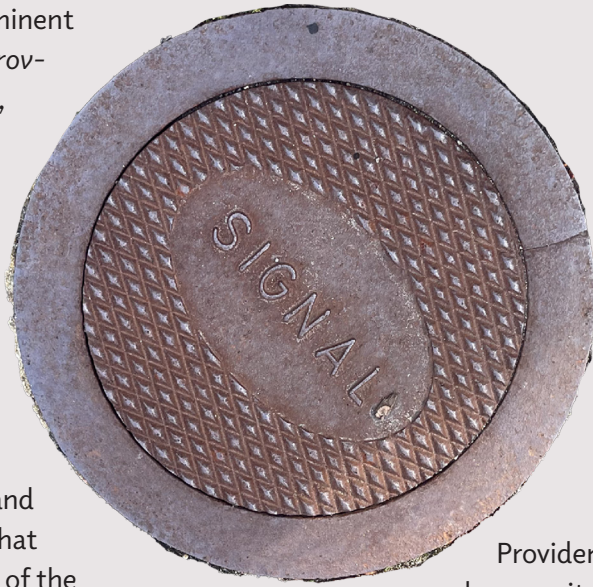


Each of these became the centers of production to support the Industrial Revolution—reshaping sections of agricultural land into large factories. The majority of the Kolkata Presidency became West Bengal post the Indian independence movement. Factory towns, such as Dasnagar contributed to the sudden rise of concentrated production and manufacturing in the region. These towns were populated with makers. The skilled craftspeople of the region traveled to factories that connected them to the global network of consumption and production.

Photographs of service shaft covers in Providence. Image Credit: Ash Ma, Andrew Liu, and Li Huang

Providence, Rhode Island United States

During the height of the maritime trade in the 1600-1700s in early American colonies, India Point was a key port for the trade of the tea and spices under John Brown, a prominent colonialist in *Rhode Island and the Providence Plantations*. The trade routes, from India to the British Isles and to this port of the American colonies, brought with them abundant resources and funding. The creation of *Rhode Island and the Providence Plantations*' wealth came from its ship building industry—the same industry that facilitated the trade of Indian spices and goods, Western African slaves, and Carribean rum. All the ingredients that formed the transatlantic slave trade of the 1600s. With the arrival of the Industrial Revolution, Providence's reputation changed. It became a center for industrial production of tools and machines that enabled the rapid industrialization of the United States. The history of this era is still present across the city. The red brick and steel mill buildings used to be factories, foundries, and workshops that still dot the landscape.



Providence has always been a city of makers: of welders, tool-smiths, jewellers, iron workers, bronze casters, and leather makers. In the post-WWII period, Providence, like many other American cities, halted the majority of its production and manufacturing of hardware, tools, and parts. Increasing globalization and manufacturing in other parts of the world, such as China and India, provided access to low-cost labor. Be it New York or Seattle—cities across the globe have traces of Howrah, West Bengal in their service shaft covers. Occasionally, one might even see a 'Made in India' seal brandished in the iron of a service shaft cover. In those moments, might we consider *just how much* of the Western world has been built upon the labor and resources of the non-Western world?





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The majority of the Kolkata Presidency became West Bengal post the Indian independence movement. Factory towns, such as Dasnagar contributed to the sudden rise of concentrated production and manufacturing in the region. These towns were populated with makers. The skilled craftspeople of the region traveled to factories that connected them to the global network of consumption and production. The makers in each of these places, be it Providence in the 1700s or Dasnagar in the 2010s, are connected to a global supply chain of constant production and consumption.

More importantly, we are linked to a lineage of labor and industrial oppression. In the colonist expedition, we termed the unfair extraction of resources and labor as 'trade'—the 'trade' of spices, precious metals, textiles, and even human bodies. In the 21st century, we consider these exchanges to be exploitative and indicative of an archaic society. Still—our systems

of global, intercontinental transfer remain inherently rooted in the foundations of colonial power. With the knowledge of the intrinsic link between South Asian and the global legacies of empires, it is important to understand how we plan to chart new paths in reimagining our futures and retelling the stories of our past.

Tactile Texts

Reimagining the Museum Archive

As humans, we are wrapped in fabric from the day we are born, until the day we die. The experience of textiles arises from a visceral reaction to how fabrics indefinitely hold the body and dress the interior.

What does it mean to sense a fabric without touching it? What does it mean to smell or taste a fabric?

In an attempt to problematize prescriptive methods of recordkeeping that assume fixed, static, and authoritarian definitions and theories of explanation, we propose a new way to archive and catalog the museum collection. This speculative sensory document gnaws at bridging the experiential lacunae between visitors and objects on display in museum galleries to enhance haptic literacy and invite immersion in cultural understandings and sensory experiences beyond what is often held in 75-word museum labels. How does this experience transcend what we predominantly perceive through the visual domain?

This work proposes a sensory, speculative alternative to the traditional archive. Four garments from the South Asian collections of the Museum of Art at Rhode Island School of Design were revisited and reimagined using phenomenological subjective first-person sensory data from creators, consumers, and researchers, coupled with conceptual experiments in machine learning software.

This work is from 'Sensory Silhouettes,' an exhibition in The Aldrich Gallery by the Virtual Textiles Research Group and the Costumes and Textiles Department at the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design. Special thanks to Kate Irvin, Curator of Costume and Textiles, RISD Museum and Joy Ko, Critic of Textiles and Industrial Design, RISD.

*Written by Yukti V. Agarwal
Designed by Mehek Gopi Vohra*

Sensory Speculations

Maker/Place: Salvi/Patan, Gujarat, India

Item: Patolu Sari with Zari Border

Date: late 1800s-early 1900s

Material: Silk plain weave, double ikat dyed;

Zari (gold-metallic-wrapped silk yarn)

Accession No.: 55.292

Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich

Remarks:

Deriving its name from the word sal or 'loom,' the Salvis are also known as the Patiwala or Patua community.

The word patola is the plural form; the singular is patolu.

'Ikat' comes from the Malay -Indonesian expression 'mangikat,' meaning to bind, knot, or wind around.

Touch:

Seems ridged like the surface of intricately carved wood but is the smooth, polished surface of matte ceramics. Watery to the touch; it slips between the fingers. A hazy fog, with only a mere illusion of its existence.

Hear:

A movement that sounds like a threaded symphony with a four-piece orchestra. The resonating sound of the ghatam played in alternating succession. The whispering rustle of the subterranean. Water trickling down step wells. The reverberating hum of the temple bell. The chants of the pandit within a stone temple. The distant call of a street vendor masked by chatter in a bustling town.

Woven in the Gujarati city of Patan over the course of at least eight months, this *patola sari* required tremendous skill and labor in its making. For generations, weavers in the Salvi community have passed down the complex double-ikat technique, wherein both warp and weft are dyed in specific patterns before weaving. Stylized motifs emerge as the weft is carefully aligned with the warp, resulting here in the historical *jhummar* composition of heart-shaped *pipal* (sacred fig) and *paan bhat* (leaf) motifs in the center field and *nari-kunjar-popat-ful bhat* (dancing girl-elephant-parrot-flower) in the border.

Often worn by the mother of a bride in Gujarati weddings, saris like this would be kept as a family heirloom, with the cloth believed to ward off evil and protect the wearer. Note the many small areas of darning in this sari.



Smell:

④ Linger floral and earthy aromas. Morning dew that carpets each blade of grass. Wet brick and damp stone walls. The musty whiff of the white bark of kala kinar after the first rain and the golden shower of amal-tas after a storm. The punchy fragrance of hand-squeezed ber sherbet in the arid north. The thorny gum sap of babul.

Taste:

⑤ Raw turmeric and dried pomegranate peels. Rich and spicy like biryani, with its aromatic rice, tender vegetables, and blended spices. Vibrant and sweet like aamras and puri, the sweet mango pulp and soft and greasy bread. Textured and earthy taste of dhokla with chutney with its spongy feel and tangy tamarind aftertaste.

See:

① A highly pixelated grid of a digital image. A stylized graphic quality that resembles the continuous pattern of striations seen on a cross-section of red granite. The rays of sunlight that passes through a clear body of water. The field of undulating deep reds and cool blues, punctuated by a texture akin to the granular interior of an ivory tusk, exposed only by the gentle carvings along its length. The symphony of colors resembles a distant view of a mathematically precise mosaiced surface or a smudged, scratched aquarelle painting. A forgiving embrace when draped on the body. With each pleat of the sari, there is a distortion that creates an undistinguishable mass of vibrance activated by movement.



Above: Resist dyeing the weft for the double ikat technique prior to weaving. Image Credit: Saurabh Chatterjee via Flickr

Left: Weaving of Patolu saris on a handloom in Patan. Image Credit: Priti Bhatt via Architectural Digest India

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Above: Painting from East India Company School depicting a woman in a red Bandhani sari draped in the Gujarati style. Image Credit: Khamir Organization

This *odhani* (woman's head covering) was made using the tie and dye *bandhani* technique, commonly practiced in the North West Indian states of Gujarat and Rajasthan. Derived from the terms *bandh* (Sanskrit) and *bandhavanu* (Gujarati), meaning 'to tie,' bandhani refers to both the fabric as a whole and the technique that requires parts of the textile to be tied into knots with yarn to resist their absorption of the dye, resulting in spotted patterns.

The finished fabric is highly textured and, in this case, lightweight and vibrantly colored. Featuring tree designs within circular medallions in the main field and ornate green borders, this *odhani* also includes dots tinted black to mimic the appearance of *abhla* (mirror) embroidery, which typically embellishes bandhani *odhanis*.

Hear:

The deep gurgle of a dye bath—the striking smack of drenched fabric on a stone surface. A silver wind chime shifted by the faintest breeze at dawn. An echo of a distant sound reverberating in an enclosed cave. The faraway music of the bansuriwala (flute seller) on a winter Sunday morning. The staccato harmonium played by a novice. The high-pitched sa-re-ga-ma of a trained classical singer in a backway alley.

See:

Invisible drawstrings run through this bandhani. A mere whisper of the thread that once synched every inch of this fabric. A paradox-of appearing dangerous and thorny as a mere facade to conceal its inherent delicacy—almost like a bougainvillea bush. Soft in its mountainous terrain. It is pointy and pokey but gentle. Speckled like the splatter of paint or a collection of ink blots on an undulating surface—as if the technique of chintz were to be applied to the fleeting rumbles of a summer breeze.

Touch:

There is a sense of non-existence in its being. A breeze, when you run your fingers through the fabric. It doesn't exist beyond a ghost touch that disappears quickly. Yet, it is the topographical map of ant hills under calloused hands or medallions of terrains on old, saggy skin. Lychee skin on a powdery matte satin that dissolves when rubbed between the fingers. The echo of synched yarn is synesthetic—both visual and tactile. It leaves the remnant of a refreshing, cooling chill, a lingering kiss from a long-lost lover.



Artisans holding up a Bandhani fabric.
Image Credit: Khamir Organization

Smell:

Wet earth but in a crisp way. The first day of summer, inaugurated by rain. Hints of jasmine and rose, peppered with a whiff of cardamom. A clean earthiness to the scent, mixed with rich, smoky incense that inundates ritual spaces and warm community gatherings.

Maker/Place: Possibly Khatri maker, Kutch or Saurashtra, Gujarat, India

Item: Bandhani Odhani (head scarf)

Date: late 1800s-early 1900s

Material: Silk gajji (satin weave), bandhani (tied and resist-dyed)

Accession No.: 55.470

Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich

Remarks:

The word Khatri is derived from the term Kshatri; traditionally, Khatri have been weavers, dyers, and printers.

Gajji is a vegetable-based silk fabric with a satin weave. The result of this unique style of weaving is a lightweight, rich fabric with a glossy texture and a lush look.

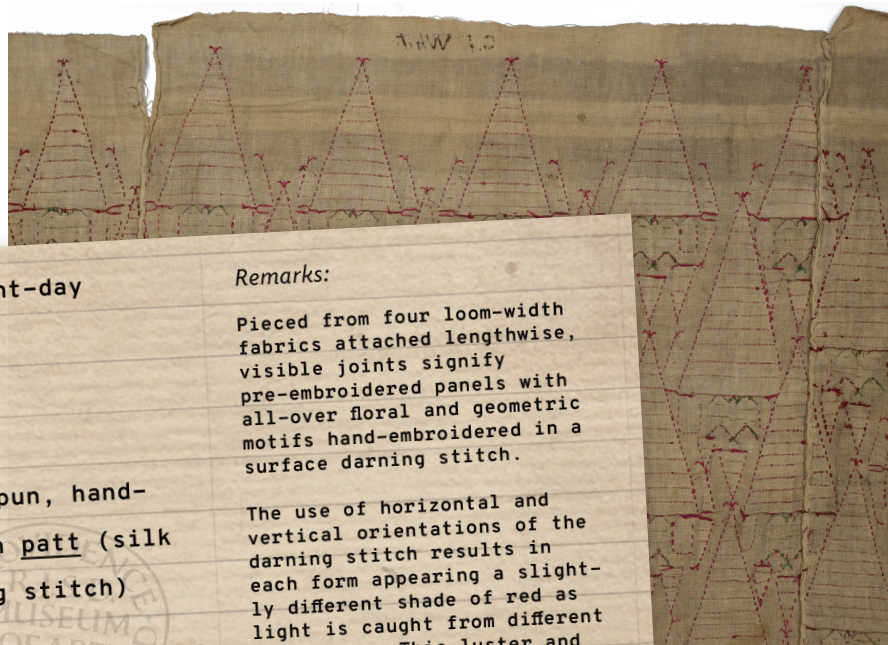
Taste:

Silky and yet crunchy like jalebi. A slice of watermelon on a sultry summer day. Light, airy cotton candy and softie ice-creams at a mela. Surti undhiyu, with its mix of fresh vegetables, fenugreek dumplings, and subtle spices. Refined sweetness of mohanthal, with its fluffy mix of flour and ghee leaving a velvet aftertaste that melts in the mouth. Unfolds like a combination of honeyed nectar and the essence of blooming flowers that leave you yearning for just a bit more.

29

29

280



Maker/Place: Punjabi maker, Present-day

India and Pakistan

Item: Thirma Bagh Phulkari

Date: late 1800s

Material: Chaunsa Khaddar (handspun, hand-woven cotton plain weave) with patt (silk floss yarn) embroidery (darning stitch)

Accession No.: 2011.45.7

Georgianna Sayles Aldrich Fund

Remarks:

Pieced from four loom-width fabrics attached lengthwise, visible joints signify pre-embroidered panels with all-over floral and geometric motifs hand-embroidered in a surface darning stitch.

The use of horizontal and vertical orientations of the darning stitch results in each form appearing a slightly different shade of red as light is caught from different directions. This luster and shimmer would be exaggerated when activated by movement through space when worn.

See:

① An embroidered kaleidoscope. A patchworked surface, where each thread is a brushstroke on a raw canvas. The colors are fireworks against a night sky, the flames of a bonfire that illuminate an eclipsed darkness. An unruly, overgrown garden with swirling vines and blooming flowers that somehow remain within the confines of the architectural quadrants of the Mughal charbagh.

Hear:

2 Pulsates like the reverberating beats of the dhol (a traditional Punjabi drum) at a winter wedding. Echoes like the laughter of women gathered around a communal loom, their voices intertwining like the threads they weave. The harmonious melody of folk songs sung under the starlit sky. Whispered tales of love and longing, carried by the gentle breeze rustling through mustard flower fields.

Smell:

Punjab's fertile soil after the first monsoon rains, earthy and rejuvenating. Blooming jasmine flowers, their sweet fragrance mingling with the spicy notes of freshly ground masalas in the kitchen. Smokey air 4 filled with traces of homemade butter that emanate from the steaming hot parathas (stuffed bread) that sizzle on the tava (stove).

Touch:

3 A soft summer breeze over freshly plowed earth, rich and fertile, promising abundance and prosperity. The embroidery, intricate and delicate, is akin to tracing the lines of a beloved's face in the darkness. It caresses the skin and leaves a velvety residue. To be wrapped in this shawl's cocoon is to be held by the warmth of a mother's embrace at dusk.

Taste:

5 Sweetness of ripe mangoes, dripping down your chin on a scorching summer day, like a burst of sunshine in each bite. Warmth of freshly brewed chai, swirling with spices and served in clay cups along the side of the road. Richness of butter chicken, the tender meat bathed in a creamy tomato gravy, served with fragrant basmati rice. The comfort of dal makhani, simmered for hours with buttery, creamy lentils, and aromatic spices.

Made in the Undivided Punjab region (present-day India and Pakistan), *phulkari*—*phul* (flower) and *kari* (work)—are characterized by embroidered geometric patterns representing the natural world. When the embroidered designs completely cover the cloth, as here, the cloth is called *bagh* (garden), a labor- and time-intensive endeavor.

Unlike other types, *Thirma Phulkaris* were made exclusively by Hindu and Sikh women who embroidered *patt* silk floss imported from Afghanistan, Bengal, and China onto a coarse, unbleached off-white cotton called *khaddar* (usually spun, woven, and dyed locally), which symbolized purity. The craft was passed down among women, with young girls beginning embroidering *phulkaris* for their dowry and wearing them for sacred rituals connected to childbirth, death, and marriage. With the division of Punjab during independence from Great Britain in 1947, political upheaval resulted in the tradition being largely discontinued.



Photograph of a Patiala Punjabi woman (Ilahijan Tawayif) in a Phulkari odhani, ca.1900.
Image Credit: Photo India Heritage



Photograph of five Parsee women in Gara saris.
Image Credit: The Indian Express

See: ①

Rich red silk resembles the dancing embers of the eternal flame that has burned for centuries in the sacred fire temple in Udvada. The cream satin-silk thread, in the hallowed halls of the agiary. From the songbirds perched amidst gnarled trees, to lotus flowers blooming in vibrant hues, the intricate patterns are a tapestry of community heritage. The drape evokes images of the oceans the Zoroastrians crossed to escape their Persian persecutors.

Featuring Chinese-made or inspired embroidery, *Gara saris* are associated with the Parsee community in India—Zoroastrian exiles who fled Persia in the 8th century and settled in West Central India, primarily Gujarat. This impressive *akho garo sari* (*akho*, ‘fully embroidered’; *garo*, ‘width’) depicts perched songbirds, gnarled trees, lotus flowers, and peacocks and would have been worn by a wealthy Parsee woman, possibly for her wedding.

Despite assimilating into local culture, the Parsee community developed a unique dress sensibility over time. As traders, the Parsees brought ornately embroidered silk satins made for the Indian market from China. Over time, the word *garo* was exclusively associated with the Chinese embroidered sari. Gara saris are worn draped in the traditional Gujarati manner and passed on as family heirlooms.

Hear: ②

The melodic, rhythmical chants of priests echoing through the halls of the agiary. The soft murmur of prayers. The distant clang of metal vessels and the lively chatter of bustling Irani cafes. It is both Mumbai's Bhendi Bazaar, filled with the calls of street vendors and the melodic strains of traditional Gujarati folk songs. Traces of chirping songbirds and the gentle rustling of leaves in the breeze.

Touch: ③

The silk satin is a comforting embrace of a Parsi grandmother's hug, and the embroidery is the delicate pattern of a Parsi rangoli at the threshold of a home. All together, it is the feeling of a gentle breeze grazing your face as you make your way through the crowded, narrow lanes of old Bombay in early winter.

Maker/Place: Made in China for the Parsee community, Surat, India

Item: Akho Garo Sari

Date: late 1800s

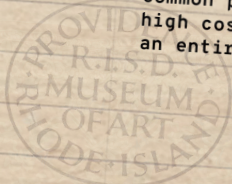
Material: Sali Ghaj (silk) satin weave, embroidered

Accession No.: 55.286

Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich

Remarks:

Garo or gara, which translates to 'width,' refers to unstitched lengths of embroidered silk, often worn as saris by Parsi women, a common practice due to the high cost of embroidering an entire saree length.



Smell:

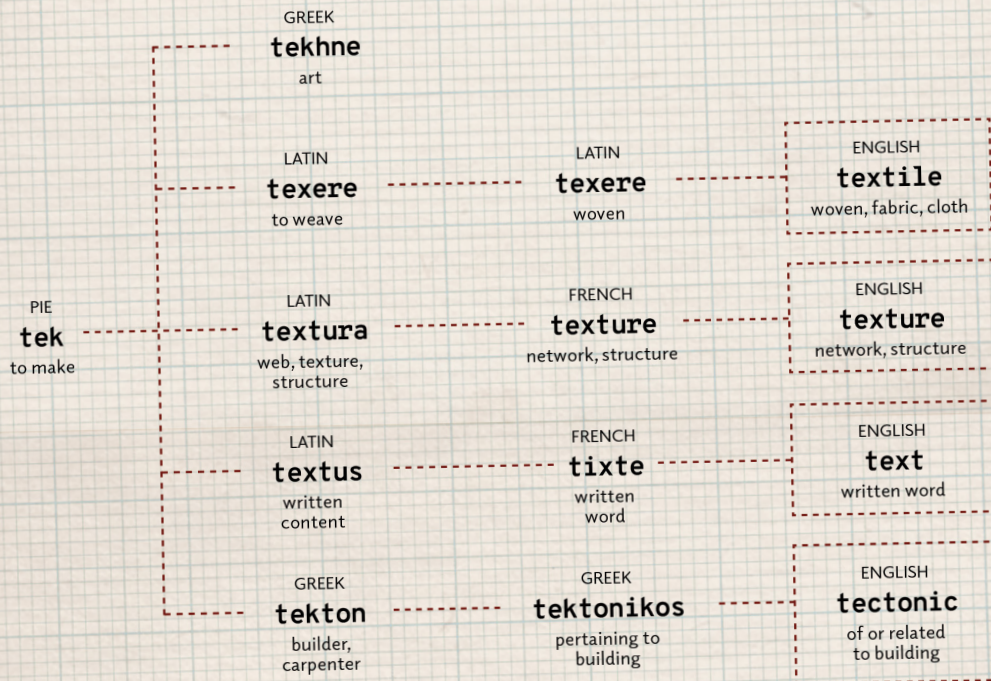
4
The scent of jasmine and rose, mingled with the earthy fragrance of natural woods in a lush garden with many groves, where the air is heavy with a natural floral perfume. The sweet fragrance of rosewater and cardamom punctuates the heaviness. Notes of cumin, coriander, and saffron mingle with the subtle scent of sandalwood incense arising from nearby kitchens. The lingering scent of Parsi chai and freshly baked bun maska (buttered bread) wafts on lazy afternoons.

Taste:

5
Hints of tangy vinegar and sweet jaggery. Hearty like dhansak, a stew made with lentils, vegetables, and meat. Warm and steamy like patra ni machi, fish filets marinated in a flavorful coconut and herb paste, wrapped in banana leaves. Flavors that linger on the tongue like the spice from the scrambled eggs in freshly prepared akuri, or the tang of the tomatoes in the tender lamb of sali boti.



It is but natural—the most intuitive way to allow an experience of textiles that bars touch itself comes from using descriptive texts. ‘Textiles’ and ‘text’ originated from the same Proto-Indo-European root ‘tek.’ Here, the text serves as a portal unbound by time and geography—to transport each viewer to places and spaces where these textiles were once woven, worn, and weathered.



Research tools include OpenAI's ChatGPT and Microsoft x Museum of Art and Photography's INTERWOVEN.

Notes of Sensorium

Written and designed
by Sejal Gupta

In Sensorium: Notes for My People

¹ Hereafter, and commonly
referred to as *Tanaïs*.

A memoir by Tanwi Nandini Islam¹ is
deceptively undemanding... at first.

The Bangladeshi author invites readers into a nuanced narrative about intersectional identity that extends beyond a personal experience. It is a commentary on social structures and powers that have persisted through epistemic memory, history, and the present. 'The Notes' that remain with the reader are hardly as they appear at first glance in the title.

² It is April 2020 and *Tanaïs* is home in New York City. Miles away, their grandmother has caught a life-threatening fever. *Tanaïs* douses herself with *Night Blossom*—an ode to their grandmother's jasmine attar. They realise they've lost their sense of smell.

They are notes of scent the writer composes as a perfumer...

notes of reclamation they invoke as they talk about their experiences in being a queer, Muslim, Bangladeshi femme...

and notes of resistance that fight dominant notes of narratives which refuse to recognize non-Indian and lower-caste histories in the South Asian Subcontinent.

Structured as an ode to perfume and the author's professional entanglement with it, the book commences with a ritualistic re-telling of a story that feels all-too-familiar...²
too recent to be written about...

and yet, it is distant.

The author's non-linear timeline oscillates between explicating the history of perfume and its poetic, yet paradoxical material significance in today's world.

Perfume is as much a verb as it is a noun.
It is passive and continuous,
Inherently tied to material goods, trade, and luxury.

Perfume, and the art of making it, travelled along the Silk Route. Within South Asia, the definition of perfume fashioned itself to its needs.

The incense of burned Frankincense bathed the clothes of the ancients.
The scent of jasmine stood as a testament of proof in Gandharva³
love ceremonies.
Turmeric is still used to wade off sickness.

Through this, perfume—a smoke signal, becomes intertwined with the written word, evoking a lingering, synesthetic experience that transcends intellectual discourse.

³ 'Gandharva' alludes to a group of celestial musicians and dancers in Hindu mythology.

Tanaïs' memoir documents a story of erasure which has historically lacked adequate vocabulary because of the diversities it encompasses.

Scent as a Portal

⁴ It has an overwhelming material presence, but it cannot be grasped by the haptic or the visual.

⁵ The author talks about perfume as a portal to ascend trauma, recall real places, ancestral lands and pain. They term this phenomenon Scent Memories.

⁶ On a trip to Kolkata, Tanaïs visits Kalighat—a temple for Kali. On becoming aware that the writer is from Bangladesh, a man who was amicable at first accuses them and questions their place in the temple with the prasaad. It is only when a fellow Indian friend speaks in Hindi to him does he calm down. Tanaïs determines their shared Indianness soothed him.

By its very nature, perfume is a portal.
It is an object of permeability.
In its materiality ⁴, perfume is immaterial.
It is as much memory ⁵ as it is matter.

Perfume transports even a bystander to places and times that exist solely in one's imaginations—in distant nooks and crannies of one's mind. Here, perfume is used as a vehicle to transport each reader to their own constructs of reality. Tanaïs' perfume 'Mala,' inspired by fragrant flower garlands, transports us to New Delhi— "It smells more like a place than a perfume," read a review.

For Tanaïs, this scent was a lingering expression of their brownness and relationship with a place that could accept the likeness of their skin, but not their faith and kin.⁶

Scent as language

Language creates meaning in existence—it roots us in a temporal and spatial reality.

Stories which are not documented—do not exist. Where language is punctuated and unmoving, scent is liminal and arbitrary.⁷

Where pre-existing language fails in identifying you, scent prevails as a new expression of the multi-cultural diasporas.

⁸ “On a map of India, every single Indian state and South-Asian country is named —but not Bangladesh. There is just an open, blank space, a niche. For most of my childhood, no one had even heard of Bangladesh. The erasure bought up an old feeling of being illegible. Invisible.”

⁷ Scent does not have a semantic language—it cannot be owned or captured. It slips through the gaps between your fingers as they scramble to tame it. In this memoir, language is scent.

Their invented language of scent functions separately from the rigidity of classifications intent on codifying people, land and material. Tanaïs communicates the sentiment of scent and its importance in highlighting memories and histories. For them, scent can evoke the intersectionalities of not being Hindu enough, South Asian enough,⁸ American enough or straight enough. It is a means of communicating a subjective scent memory that can shape itself to be lived in.

Thus, a new language is developed, one that is inspired by perfumery and reclaims a narrative that is deliberately exclusive.

Scent as personification

Tanaïs unravels their own scent memories through scattered hints. The book begins with Paramyths, falsehoods written by powerful oppressors—from the Aryans to the colonisers from the West—to serve their own selfish needs.

While the histories of some perfumes might be etched into records, the narratives of the groups the author identifies with remain unwritten and unrecorded.

Yet, scent is prevalent in carrying their unwritten legacies.

The ‘Choya Nakh’—a perfume which never makes an appearance in Sanskrit literature—is a sea-shell scent, indicative of a loose woman. Found and sold all along the Indian Ocean as an aphrodisiac scent, it became a marker of women who were exploited.

Despite this, or perhaps on account of this, the men who wrote history conveniently left out mentions of these women.

In the book, Tanaïs later uses “a single drop of scent of a loose woman—Choya Nakh oil.”

For them, this scent is a “cyborg, a synthetic-natural hybrid, a simulation of past, present and future, at once.” The perfume embodies them, and they it.⁹

History doesn’t favour their intersectionalities as a queer, femme, Muslim, Bangladeshi immigrant, but scents and stories like the Choya Nakh do—blurring the boundaries between perfume and person.

⁹ As a Bangladeshi woman, Tanaïs recounts their experiences of dating Indian men who have always been attracted to women like Tanaïs—women who would likely scandalise their mothers and be “inherently ruinous.” These Indian men would eventually always end up marrying women from their own caste, religion or status. And Bangladeshi men never even considered a “bad femme” like them an option...

Scent as matter

Perfume has played a pivotal role in creating sensorial memories and epistemologies. As much as humans have made perfume—perfume has made us. The absence of a language that can capture the essence of scent has made it as much visual, as it is olfactory. Historically, perfume was a means to segregate people and solidify caste supremacy within India.

Certain scents, materials, and their origins—like sandalwood and haskins—were exclusively reserved for the upper-caste Hindus. They defined purity, gender, and forms of power that allowed the privileged to continue exploiting Dalits.

For the writer, the scent of curry was thick with the weight of an association and identity Tanaïs would rather have forgotten.¹⁰

¹⁰ The scent notes of curry are the longest the author has kept tabs on. The shame of being associated with the cuisine but not cooking it distanced Tanaïs from the memory of home cooked food—a prominent harbinger of the diaspora.

Scent was an omen of shame when they were termed the “attack of the smellies” by a Caucasian classmate.

Tanaïs further explains how the word ‘smell’ came to be associated with primitive and barbaric people, and the legacy of it still lives on. The arbitrary notions of cleanliness are dictated by scent. Putrid and pleasant odors have created and rely on tropes of economic and social visibility.

Scent was a tool of power when ‘oriental’ perfumes were used to fortify the concept of the Orient in the West. The author writes this to preface the symbiotic relationship between memory and odor. Constant triggering by sensorial queues like scent remake and build our relationships to the world.

Scent as the memoir

Divided into:

base notes—notes of histories and traumas stored in bodies¹¹,
heart notes—stories of women, femininity, and its pain and power¹²,
and head notes—the climax, closure, experience, realisation¹³

¹¹ “*Mojave, Invisible Indians, Romantic Scientist, Orientals, Beloved.*”

¹² “*lovers rock, mother tongue, Mati, Other Language, Mala, Mala, Ngozi, How You Love.*”

¹³ “*Pilgrimage, Ancients, Psychedelia, Soliflore, Soliflore.*”

Each section of the memoir reads like a metaphorical recipe to a perfume, which steadily takes the body of scent.

Their asymmetric approach to the story mimics the fluidity of memory—lived and unlived, present and past. It resembles the lightness of perfume.


The story meanders
and settles,
and grows.

As the book explores the ambience of scent, and its ability to smell like a place, a person, and a story, it transports the reader into Tanaïs’ experiences and challenges the conventions of storytelling.

The metaphor of a perfume is an overarching theme that envelops all parts of the story and leaves a lingering impression.

Neoclassical buildings are false monuments.

They propose themselves as symbols of imperial power, built in the image of ancient Grecian and Roman architecture. Yet, these once avant-garde constructions have, over the years, been forced to reckon with environments and cultures that act in direct opposition to the ideals of a consolidated empire. As a representation of Enlightenment-era thinking, many of neoclassical architecture's philosophical propositions are greatly outdated. However, buildings built in this style exist as a possible site of learning for future adaptations of older structures.

Researching this style of architecture reveals  a connecting thread between India and the United States - both countries are home to many sites of neoclassical architecture. When these buildings were designed and conceived, they reflected the minds of imperialists who wished to strengthen their own image of power amongst subordinates.

Neoclassical architecture is decidedly of the past. It prefers to styles of Greek and Roman architecture adapted for the modern. As described by the encyclopedia 'Britannica', neoclassical architecture was a movement against ornamentation of previous periods of European architecture such as the Rococo or Baroque. It was a return to simplicity that was incredibly popular in the United States and Europe, especially in the 19th century in the United States. A distinct characteristic of neoclassical buildings include the repeated use of columns in specific greek or roman styles to define structure. Any allusion to this ancient world of architecture might be considered somewhat neoclassical.

Kenneth Frampton, in an essay on avant garde architecture, posits that "ever since the beginning of the Enlightenment, civilization has been primarily concerned with instrumental reason, while culture has addressed itself to the specifics of expression-to the realization of the being and the evolution of its collective psycho-social reality."

A Collection of *pseudo-semi-m*

This can be understood as a broader assertion of the ways in which both Neoclassicism and the Enlightenment are tied together in their thinking. Neoclassicism is an architectural movement descending from a wave of 18th-19th century European intellectual discourse. Its materialization in colonial territories serves as a reminder of colonial power and represents the difficult relationships that these neoclassical structures maintain between the ideas they represent and the places they have occupied over the course of the past century.

They are tied together ideologically, in their intention to cement and develop ideas of empire whilst constantly in ignorance of the local environment. They are formally tied together in their descriptions of the program and the variety of architectural designs from which they plagiarize heavily. Local construction in both the United States and India were incredibly different before occupation by colonizing nations, in this case, the British.

There exists an argument that neoclassical buildings, as sites of colonial messaging, should be reappropriated to be used for programs that are both public-facing and reflective of a local context. However, through further research of these buildings, it is found that there is a more compelling argument about their current existences. Perhaps, examples of their additions and alterations over time stand as guidelines to bring older buildings into the future.

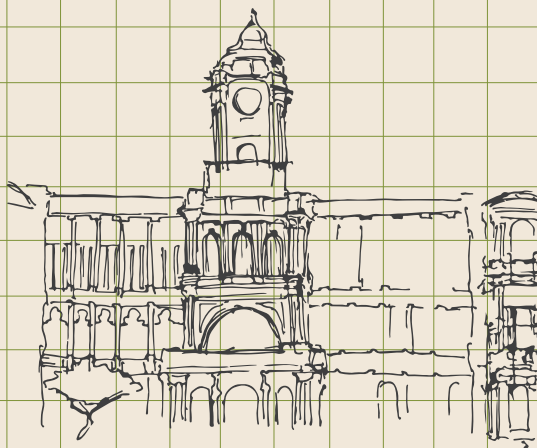
This is a presentation of neoclassical buildings, as sites of colonial messaging, which have been reappropriated by their local communities. This is achieved through a series of additions, adjustments, and alterations, that corrupt its originally 'pure' and neoclassical form. Meticulously documenting these changes provides us an opportunity to better understand alterations in existing structures and ways in which the messaging of an intentionally harmful architecture can be disassembled through the use of the very environment and people it seeks to harm.

on-neoclassical Architecture

The Ripon Building, Chennai

This building is 7230 Square meters in size and is located in Chennai, close to the shore of Tamil Nadu that borders the Bay of Bengal. It was constructed in 1913 and initially served as the home for the Viceroy of Tamil Nadu. The Ripon Building is an example of neoclassical architecture whose symbolic imperial strength is obscured as it is further studied. This specific government building is an example of how local styles of architecture can be unintentionally adopted into neoclassical buildings. In initial studies of the column structure and ornamental cappings, the repeating colonnade is nominally neoclassical. The columns are immediately identifiable as Corinthian, a substyle of three major Greek column classifications.

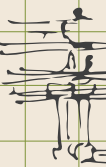
The construction materials and white color of the building can be understood as conforming to the neoclassical style. This building may seem far removed from local forms of construction that includes a variety of different styles. Yet, these styles are interconnected in both their form and location.



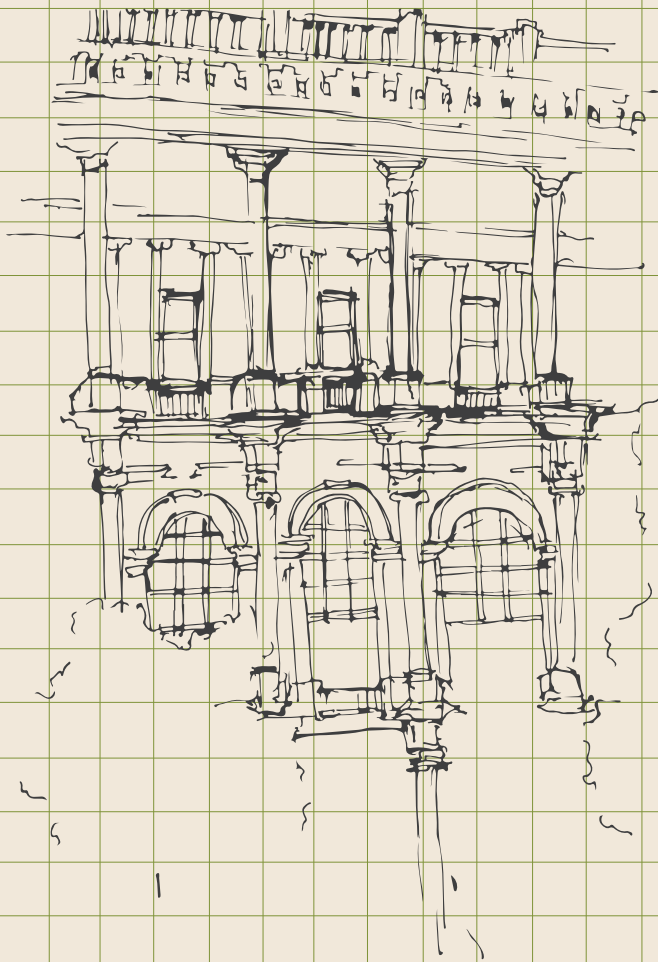
The pairing of the Ripon Building with the towering gopurams of Chennai and other parts of South India begin to demystify the seemingly removed construction. In a simple definition- which might fail to acknowledge the immense history of this structure- gopurams can be described as gateways that appear above entrances in stone-cut temples in South India.

Other parts of the temple include the Garbhagriha, a central chamber housing the deity of the temple, and the Vimana, a tower that is similarly terraced above the same central chamber. The temples are configured with large courtyards around which the wall that carries the gopuram encloses the temple. This is part of an intricate system of temple building. The gopuram tapers toward the top in a series of terraced layers where carvings of deities are laced into the intricate stonework of its built form. A formal characteristic of gopurams is the repetition of columns that alternate between carved characters, framing the structure of the temple.

Although Greek and Roman forms of architecture generally have equally spaced columns that repeat along borders, the Ripon Building sports a repeating set of columns, with one slightly smaller than the others. In many ways, this specific column condition can be understood and mirrored in gopurams found throughout Chennai. An example of a temple that holds a gopuram is the Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple located five hours south from the Ripon Building.



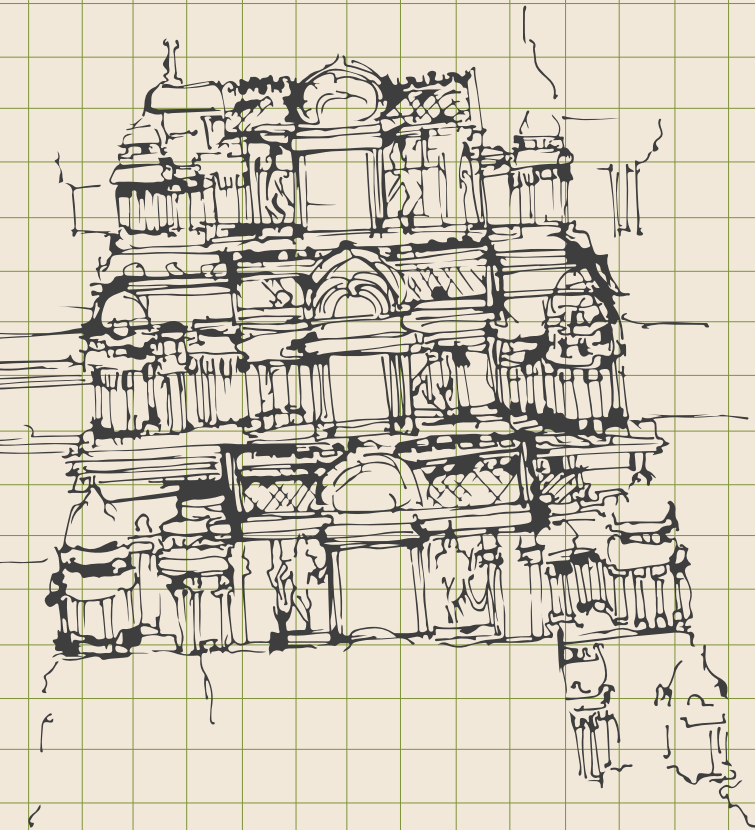
Top: The Ripon Building
Right: Detail of column structure
Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple
Gopuram in Chennai



NOT BUILT FOR PEOPLE
WHO BUILT IT. SYMBOLIC
REINFORCEMENT OF
THE NATURE OF IMPERIALISM.

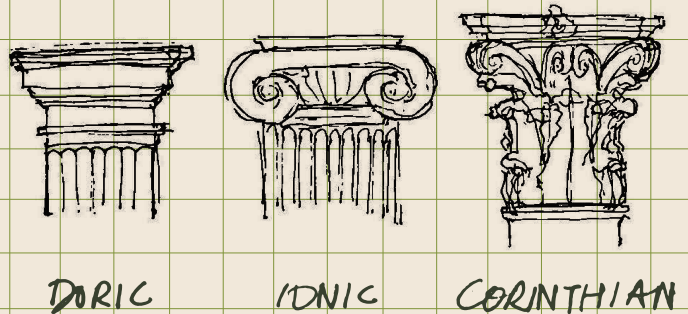
Another example of a temple with a gopuram, though in a much older style, is Mahabalipuram. Predominant architectural features of the building such as its flat top roof are also adopted from local architectural constructions according to their success and functionality in the local environment.

The building stands as a meaningful example of how architecture, when built with little consideration for the environment, becomes forced to reconcile with its environmental and cultural context. The underlying structure of the roof is not entirely a masonry structure, but is instead supported by a series of teak wood trusses; this is, of course, uncommon of a truly pure structure of the Greek and Roman empires. In the case of the Ripon building, considering the alterations brought by its local context is critical to realize its current form. How does this understanding allow for us to reconsider adaptations or interventions into the building? Perhaps, the only intervention that needs to occur is the learning and documentation of these shifting changes.



The Asiatic Society, Mumbai Town Hall

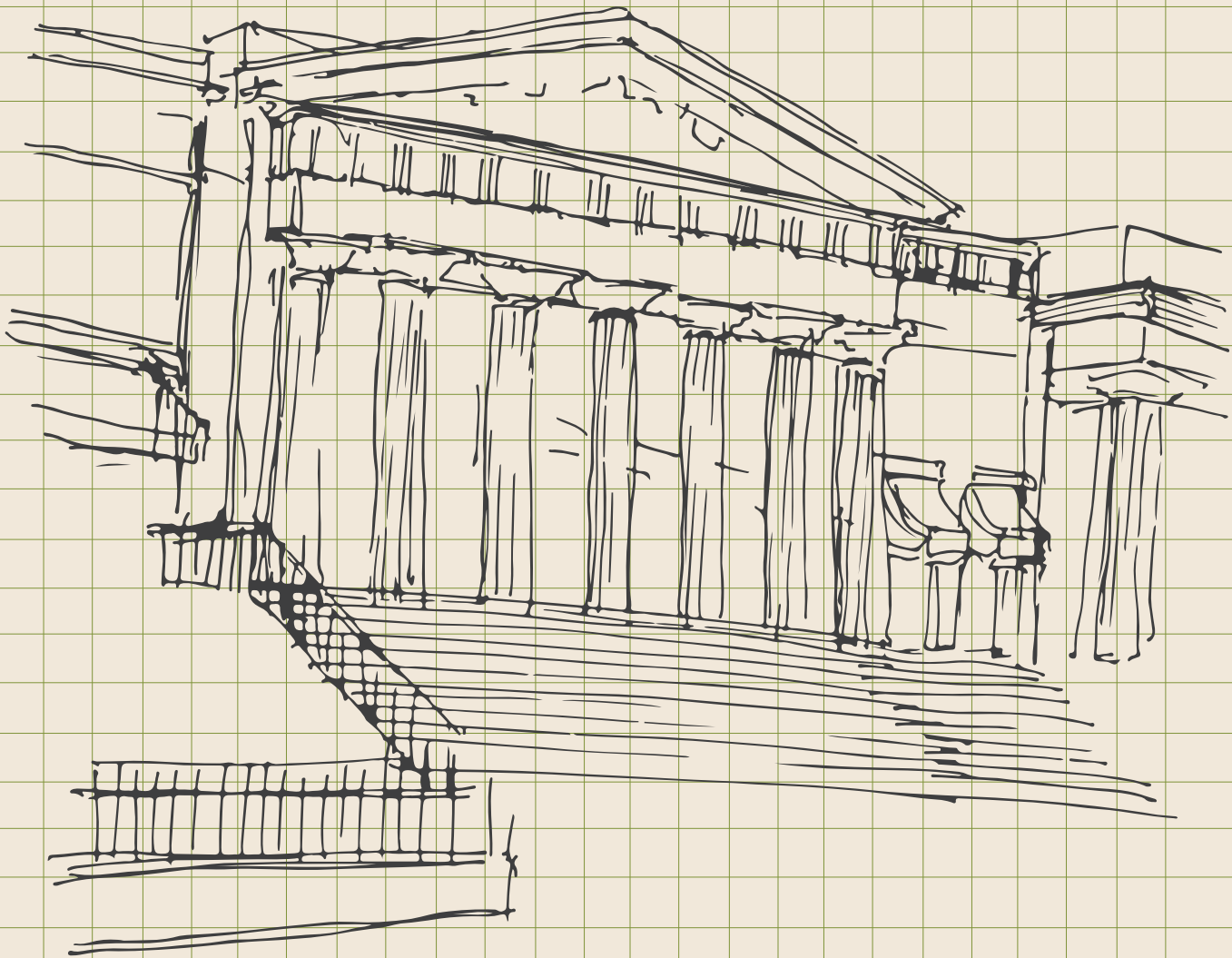
The Asiatic Society of the Mumbai Town Hall is a building that is 60 meters along its facade and is 30 meters tall. It is located in Mumbai, close to the shore bordering the Indian Ocean, and was built in 1833 as a home for the newly founded Asiatic Society. The Asiatic society of the Mumbai Town Hall is a neoclassical building categorized as a grade I heritage structure per the Heritage Regulations of Greater Bombay. As a neoclassical building, it stands as an example of how internal program can disrupt the symbolic and monumental stature of these buildings. It is a neoclassical building as understood through the use of its repeating Doric columns and low sloping roof. It is a particularly interesting case of a neoclassical building because of its relatively similar program over time. The building currently functions as both a library and museum and was originally conceived as a home for the literary society of Mumbai. The structure is an exception to the common use of neoclassical buildings, as it was primarily a space for a community through which the preservation of Indian culture was its primary objective. The form of the building seems diametrically opposed to its internal programming.



The Asiatic Society, founded in the 1800s, claims “Many were active and influential in public life, engaging with issues of social reform and nationalism. The subjects included within its scope, and the personalities associated with it- both British and Indian- have rendered it inevitable that in its two centuries of existence, the Society has been in close step with nationally significant intellectual currents.” Against this seemingly non-traditional, community-oriented programming, the form of a neoclassical building is almost confusing. If the visual symbolism of this architecture is meant to represent empire and a consolidation of British power, the program inside speaks to the very opposite of that.

This is an example of how a building’s internal program can disrupt the assertions made by the Doric columned-exterior. One of the solutions to adapting neoclassical buildings would be to shift the program of these spaces to be more reflective of the community it borders. This specific example includes the ‘Asiatic Society’, whose primary interest is advancing collective knowledge of South Asian culture.

*Classifications of columns as Doric,
Ionic and Corinthian
Right: Elevation of the Asiatic Society,
Mumbai Town Hall*



DOES THE SAME SYMBOLISM
NEED TO BE COMPLETELY
ERASED TO REMOVE ITS
MEANING???

Quite recently, the internal wood framing and additional stone and plasterwork were undertaken for retrofitting. The seemingly purely neoclassical museum-library is interrupted by various environmental conditions and programmatic insertions, and serves as an example of how neoclassical buildings are not the ideological monuments they suggest themselves to be. It also stands as an example for how the ideology of this building can be deconstructed by program specific to its context.

The State House, Providence

The State House of Providence Rhode Island is located in Providence and serves as home to both legislative bodies of the Rhode Island Congress. It was built in 1903 and is 225 feet tall in height; chambers for both the senate and house are roughly measured at 56 feet by 56 feet with a 45 foot height per floor.

The Rhode Island State House is an example of how the adaptation and alteration of a neo-classical building can embrace the processes of deconstruction and exhibition. Built in 1895, it is primarily constructed of Georgian marble and sports the fourth-largest structural stone dome in the world. This masonry structure is considered part of the Italian Renaissance Revival movement. It has also been classified as part of the American Renaissance, a movement that could be considered analogous to neoclassical. It was rooted in a desire to develop the image of empire and imperial power. However, the column structures and materials justify its classification as neoclassical architecture. The program of the building is also institutional, as it is home to legislative bodies within Rhode Island and has undergone multiple structural retrofits during its time.

As described on 'Couplage of Capitalism', the building underwent various structural repairs and semi-regular maintenance of its internal wall finishes and surfaces. Further additions and retrofits concerned with fire safety updates and restoration of terraces, stairs, exterior surfaces would occur into the early 2000s. However, in terms of additions and alterations, the most interesting example is the removal of the 'Independent Man' from the top of the State House's Dome.

RAMIFICATIONS OF ADJUSTING
NEOCLASSICAL ARCHITECTURE
CAN EXTEND TO OTHER FORMS
OF SYMBOLIC ARCHITECTURE,
WORK AND ART.

As residents of Providence might remember, during the later part of 2023, scaffolding encased the main dome of the building. This was, of course, in an effort to remove the statue of the 'Independent Man'. This statue, built in the image of Roger Williams, rests atop the dome of the capitol building. As a part of restoration process, the monument was removed and put on display nearby, while the base on the dome was repaired. While it was alteration borne out of circumstance and not intention, it could serve as an example of the process of deconstruction. This deconstruction would begin with taking apart the building piece by piece and exhibiting its parts. These pieces would then be supplemented by an intentional explanation of the specific histories that they choose to invoke.

Disassembling this monument, and perhaps confronting the legacy of Roger Williams might be a productive way to reconsider neoclassical buildings. By removing parts of the monument and explaining its material composition, use, the labor involved in constructing these buildings, perhaps we could begin to deconstruct, both physically and metaphorically, the violent role of neoclassical architecture throughout the world.

Neoclassical architecture stands as both a symbol of imperial power and the violence of colonialism. Physical deconstruction of this architecture might provide an avenue for reconsideration of its legacy.



15 Westminster Street, Providence

The building was originally built by the Rhode Island Hospital Trust company in 1919 as its headquarters. In 1974, a new addition to 15 West finished construction and dwarfed its 174 foot smaller partner. The new Hospital Trust Tower was a 413 foot tall 28 floor high-rise.

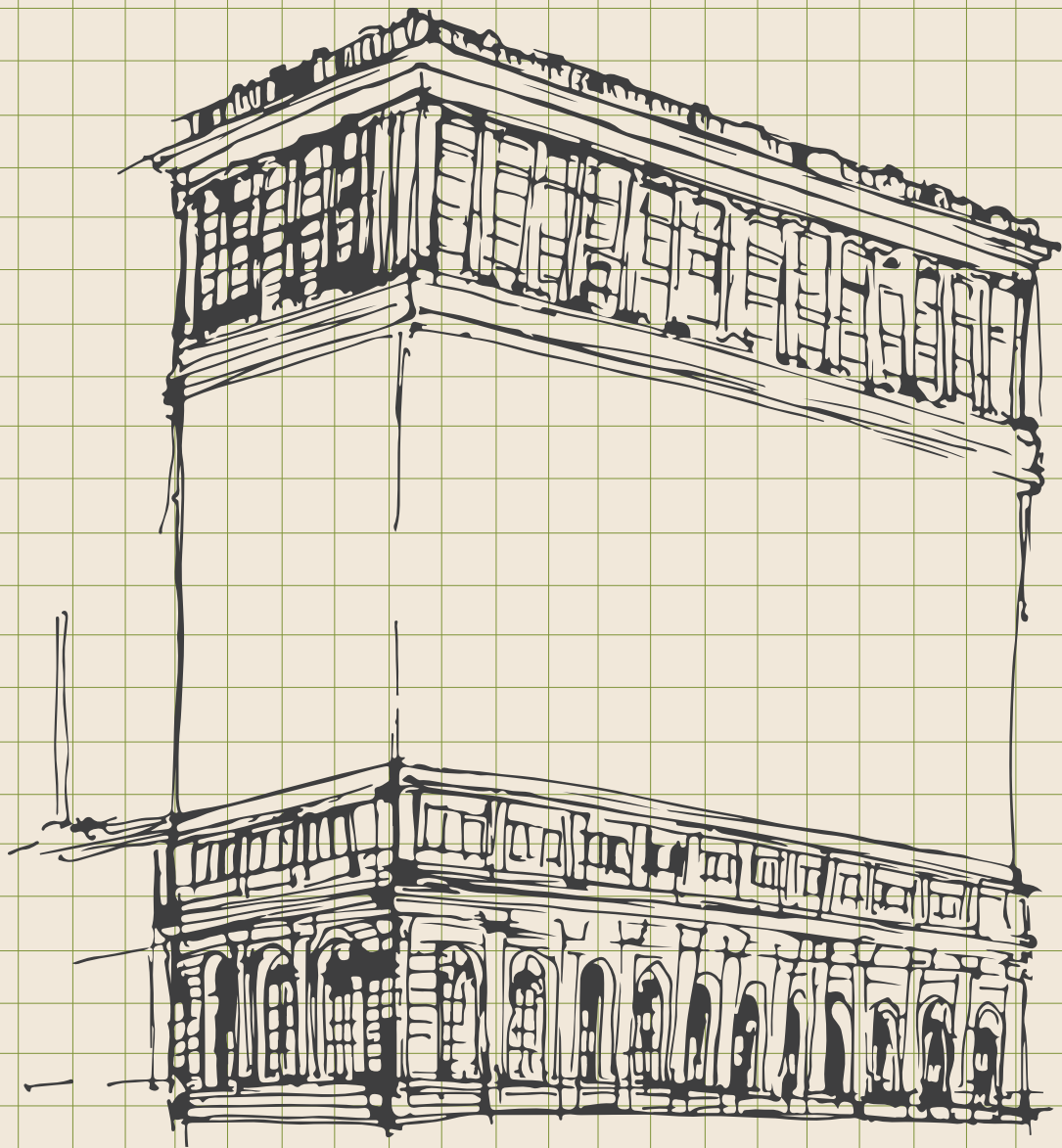
As recognized by RISD students, '15 West' is otherwise described through the facade engraving by the type 'The Hospital Trust'. It is a case study in how neoclassical buildings can either be added or developed in direct contrast to the style with which they were originally constructed. The building can broadly be classified under Italian Renaissance Revival Architecture. This specific movement of architecture includes buildings constructed between 1910-1930 that were primarily masonry structures. Similarly featured sites present within 15 West include parapet walls enclosing a flat roof, floor divisions by ornamentation, overlapping stones at corners, and roughed exterior stones at its base. However, the columns that space the arched windows of the first level and the columns that reappear between the 10th and 11th floor are both elements of Greek and Roman architecture. The columns that wrap the base of the construction are classified as Corinthian, while the top columns could be considered Ionic due to the rounded crest that culminates in two equally spaced circles away from the column.



PERHAPS THE ONLY WAY
TO DECONSTRUCT THE
CANON OR LEGACY OF
THESE MONUMENTS IS
TO DISREGARD THEM.

IF WE RESPOND TO ITS
IDEAS, WHO ARE WE
RESPONDING TO??

Top: Column detail of Fleet Library,
15 Westminster, Providence
Right: External Ionic and Corinthian
column expressions along the
facade of 15 Westminster



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In this understanding of the structure as a not purely neoclassical construction, it is interesting to consider how it has been adapted and altered throughout time. The two buildings, originally the Hospital Bank Building, and its much taller counterpart the Hospital Trust Tower building, are connected through an atrium that moves along Westminster street. In terms of the building's character, the tower is very much of the 1960-70s high rise family. Aside from sharing some similarities in the height of their corresponding floors, the buildings could not be more distinct in their form.

Visually, little can be understood about the true intentions of the designers of the tower and why there was such a heavy contrast between the existing structure and their proposed additions. Regardless, this also exists as an example of how neoclassical buildings can be added to or altered in such a way that the addition is incredibly obvious. Visually distinctive additions are bold and serve as a visual interruption of the neoclassical ideology, as opposed to a programmatic or conceptual break.



Rangon ki Boli



The Hindustani Linguistics of Color

Written by Vishakha Ruhela

Designed by Chahak Surana

Colors present a multi-faceted visual experience, and their vocabulary varies across cultures due to linguistic and cultural diversity. Despite that, the terminology for experiences related to colors in design discourse remains dominantly English. I am Indian—Hindustani is my mother tongue. I have been brought up in an English-medium school where Hindi and Sanskrit were given equal importance as English. Hence, I think in a mix of these languages. At times, my experience of the world is better if I think in Hindustani.

By ignoring the multicultural linguistics of colors, we miss an opportunity to experience our visually-stimulating world in refreshing ways. Still, we deprive ourselves of indigenous knowledges, as many non-English terminologies of color come from local names of natural substances, folklores, and rituals. The natural colors we use in our daily lives are mostly extracted from metal, plants, insects, and minerals. Etymologically, their Hindustani terms provide information about their origin and their use, as they allude to the materiality of the color.

I feel the essence of colors more deeply when I use their names in my mother tongue of हिंदुस्तानी (Hindustani), which combines Hindi and Urdu. When I listen to a Bollywood song such as रंग दे बसंती (rang de basanti—color me saffron) or धानी चुनरिया (dhaani chunariya—a green long scarf worn in South Asia), I am immediately transported to the mustard fields of Indian plains.

Hindustani names of color help me visualize specific hues that are not merely primary colors. For instance, खुबानी (khubani—apricot) refers to the distinctive yellowish-orange color of the inside of an apricot. Such terminology evokes more than the sense of *seeing*. One can smell the apricot, remember its taste, and experience how it feels to the touch. The multi-sensory experience of color is more stimulating than reducing it to visual perception of ‘yellowy-orange.’

When I buy lemons, it reminds me of how a vegetable-seller near my home used to promote ripe lemons by describing them as ज़र्द (zard—a term of Persian origin). This translates to a particular yellow like the Indian Golden Oriole bird (also known as पीलक —peelak—yellowish), compared to the (sabz—a term adapted by Urdu and Hindi from Persian) which is used to describe vegetable green. This yellow is different from the deep shade of हल्दी (haldi—turmeric), or चंदन (chandan—sandalwood), and the luminous yellow glow of पुखराज (pukhraaj—topaz stone).

The phrase 'Fifty Shades of Grey' makes sense when I think of different ways I describe the color in Hindustani language. धूसर (dhoosar—ash gray) is the ash-like dull gray from the remnants of the incense sticks from my mother's temple. इस्पाती (ispaati—steel gray) is used to describe the color of steel (ispaat) like my father's old almirah. The small black-board I used to write on with chalk is described as (saletti—slate gray) because its made of slate, which is a metamorphic rock of volcanic origin. Not to confuse the shades of gray with silver—for which there are multiple terms like चांदी (chaandi—silver metal), and रूपहला (roopahala—silver-like). स्याही (siyaahi—ink) is what my grandfather used to write with by dipping the nib of his pen in it, and that's how I visualize the darkest shade of black in my mind. In comparison, the whitest of the whites is सफ़ेद (safed—the doublet of श्वेत—shvet), which means white, the color worn for funerals, as it depicts blankness. The warmer shade of white, known as off-white, is often referred to as मोती (moti—pearl white), like the earrings passed down from my mother.

Colors are an integral part of Indian culture that their linguistics are not only rooted deep in our daily lives, but also within multiple festivals that celebrate their essence and variety to foster a feeling of joy, community, and celebration.

The festival of होली (Holi) is the kaleidoscopic celebration of colors which I play every year with my loved ones using गुलाल (gulaal)—a term used to describe the powdered bright colors which we playfully smear at each other's faces. In Sanskrit, 'gul' means rose or flower, and 'aal' refers to color or alike. Therefore, gulaal etymologically translates to rose-colored or colored like a flower, that directly relates to how people in India use natural substances like flowers in color-making processes. I remember the time I lived in Auroville, an international experimental township in South India, where we celebrated the festival of Holi with turmeric, marigold flower petals, and Indigo dye instead of chemically-produced powders.

During दिवाली (Diwali), the Hindu festival of lights, people bring in colors into their homes through रंगोली (rangoli). It is the art of designing stylized or geometric patterns on the ground using gulaal, rice, or flower petals. The term is a doublet (one of two or more words in a language that have the same etymological root but have come to the modern language through different routes) of रंगावली (rangāvalī), where ‘rang’ means color and ‘avali’ means row or line. The art of making rangoli has different names in different parts of India, like ‘kollam’ in Tamil Nadu, or ‘alpana’ in Bengal. In all instances, it is considered an auspicious practice. Rangoli is often drawn at the entrances of homes to welcome deities, to bring good luck, wealth, and prosperity.

Though many visualizations of colors come from different experiences throughout my life, one of the major influences, has been through working closely with traditional textile crafts of India. From my mother’s colorful collection of sarees, to the innumerable weaves, embroideries, and prints I have encountered during my travels—textiles have always offered me a kaleidoscopic color palette. The red dye used for making अजरक (ajrakh fabric—a naturally printed and dyed fabric) in the state of Gujarat might feel different than the red of टोडा कढ़ाई (toda embroidery) of the Niligiri region of Tamil Nadu. The local plants and processes used to create such colors create subtle yet distinctive differences. Even in my current practice as a graphic designer, I type the Hindustani words of colors and use fabric references to find the exact tint of a HEX code in the Adobe color palette.

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रंगरेज़ (rangrez—dyer or colourist) refers to a highly skilled person who traditionally dyes textiles in South Asia. The art of dyeing and generating brilliant hues from natural ingredients is far more of an alchemy than chemistry. Alchemists in lore are famous for experimenting with metallic reactions resulting in vibrant hues. Similarly, a rangrez experiments throughout their life with different combinations of natural ingredients and achieves unique results every time—giving a distinctive handmade quality to the textiles they create. In sufism, a rangrez is someone who brings color to life and has the capacity to elevate even the most ordinary aspects of life, turning them into something beautiful and meaningful, just as they add hues to fabric.



Hindustani poetry and literature speaks about color in the most articulate way. अमीर खुसरो (Amir Khusro), the famous 13th and 14th-century poet from the Indian subcontinent has written magnificently about color in Urdu. One of the most famous गज़ल (ghazal—a form of poetry): छाप तिलक सब छीनी रे मोसे नैना मिलाइ के (chaap tilak sab cheeni re mose naina milai ke—you've taken away my identity, and everything from me by looking into my eyes), has a stanza where he calls his spiritual guide हज़रत रज़्वाजा निज़ामुद्दीन औलिया (Hazrat Khwaja Nizamuddin Auliya) a rangrez. The line goes like this:

बल बल जाऊं मैं तोरे रंग रजवा

अपनी सी रंग दीनी रे मोसे नैना मिलाइके

(bal bal jaaun main, tore rang rejava,

apni si rang deeni re, moh se naina milayke)

(I give my life to you, oh my cloth-dyer,
you've dyed me in yourself, by just a glance)

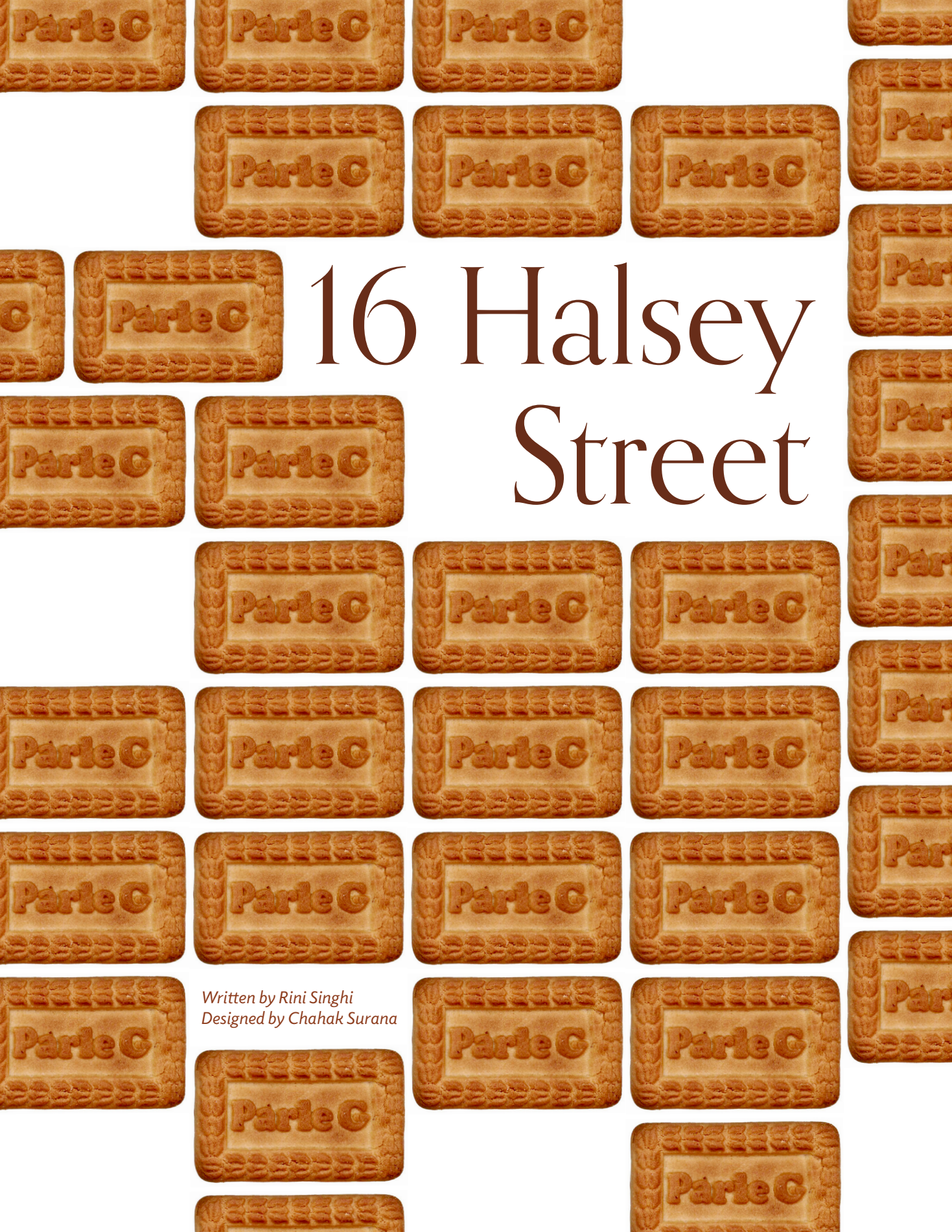
राग (rāga—a melodic mode of music) literally means ‘—coloring, tingeing, dyeing—’ and even sounds close to the word ‘rang’ (color). Like Khusro’s poetry, a ‘rāga’ colors one’s mind and soul in different emotional states.

When I worked with rangrez and छापाई कारीगर (chapaai kaarigar—block printers) in India, I observed that they use their own terminologies of colors and color related processes, to make naturally dyed and printed fabrics. I was enchanted by the different hues of reds, pinks, and blues that they described while communicating with each other to achieve the right shade of dye in the textiles. रक्त लाल (rakta laal—blood red) is a particularly deep shade of red which was achieved from several dips in the dye extracted from मंजीठा (manjitha—a Punjabi word for madder root).

सिन्दूर (sindoor) which means vermilion in English is the exact shade of red of the powder used traditionally by Hindu women in their hair parting to symbolize their marital status. मूंगा (moonga—coral) is the red people wear in their rings to protect them from evil, and ईंटी (eentie—brick-like) is the burnt red color from the local brick factories that converts भूरी (bhoori—brown) clay to solid red bricks.


In contrast to the rich and deep hues for dyes, the printing typically happens on a blank canvas of **बदामी (badaami—almond-like)** fabric, which is achieved by applying **आंवला (aanvala—myrobalan seed paste)** on it before printing. This beige-like hue is different from **खाकी (khakee—light tan brown)** which we often see in military uniforms because of its visual resemblance with the color of light brown soil of deserts and mountains. **गुलाबी (gulaabi—rose-like)** might have been the most generic word which I encountered for denoting pink because of its commonality, or even **आसमानी (aasmaani—sky blue)** for the soothing clear hue of sky. But, when dyeing with Indigo, I learnt that the word **नीला (neela—blue)**, used in our daily lives, is derived from the River Nile. A dyer narrated a folk tale describing a traveler from River Nile to India—wearing a blue turban that resembled the hue of the color of the river in his home. He told me if I wanted my favorite midnight blue on a fabric, I should strive for the **श्याम (shyaam—dark blue)** color which is a deep blue color like Lord Krishna's skin from Hindu mythology. Even when related to folk tales or religious beliefs, such stories add cultural context to local conversations and exchanges of ideas that can often act as the origin of indigenous vocabularies for colors.

I often encounter hints and glimpses of Hindustani linguistics within English: Hindustani words intermingled with English due to the colonists' interaction with the locals. Those words have more meaning for me than their English adaptation. Similarly, on the other end of the Anglo-Indian linguistic spectrum, there are terms in Hindustani used to express concepts and things that do not have an English term. Learning these stories has enriched my knowledge—and brought me closer to my home.



16 Halsey Street

*Written by Rini Singhi
Designed by Chahak Surana*

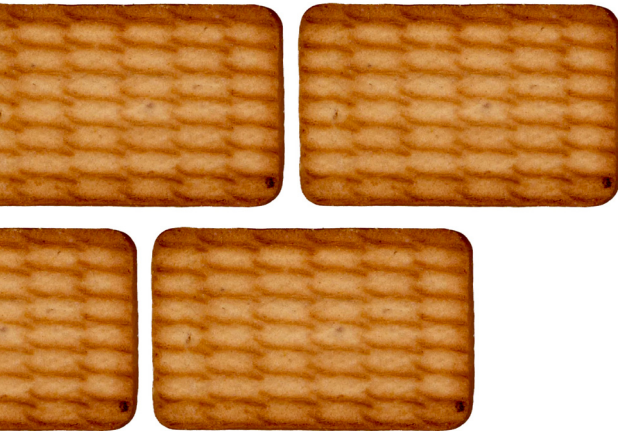


A room with two large windows, painted yellow on the outside, rests on a quiet uphill street in Providence. The bed is covered in a distinctive block-printed bedsheet from the city of Jaipur — vibrant florals against the backdrop of a snow-clad landscape. Dragging myself out of bed in a heated apartment is easier than it was at home. Heading straight to the kitchen, I place some water to boil. I use a marble mortar and pestle (bought from a Patel Brothers store) to crush a few pods of cardamom and half a piece of ginger—a prerequisite for flavorful chai. Scurrying across the kitchen, I add a handful of frozen lemongrass, a splash of milk, a pinch of sugar, a spoonful of tea leaves, and chai masala from a friend's house in Mumbai.

There is a momentary spill— one that is usually unacceptable in the kitchen— but symbolizes an overflowing need for familiarity and identity. This process of procuring often unfamiliar ingredients convinces our aged palate of comfort. They involve: a tortilla with a texture similar to a *roti*, the ubiquitous loaf of bread turned into a street style sandwich, and familiar herbs and spices blitzed into a *chutney*. The process of dumping rice with veggies in an instant pot to make *pulav* exemplifies the job of a machine to make one feel at home. The taste of food can be molded, but the setting is often alienating.

The effort then, is recreating an alfresco street food stall by hosting a chaat party at India Point Park in Providence or lighting up one's apartment on Diwali to celebrate a festival, and often just spending time with a community who understands the physicality of distance.

The two-bedroom apartment on Halsey street, adjacent to Whole Foods, was an excuse to go grocery shopping everyday. The close proximity meant regularly meandering through the aisles of the store to imagine a new recipe to cook, bookmarking things to try, and often peeking into the trolleys to decipher eating habits of fellow shoppers.



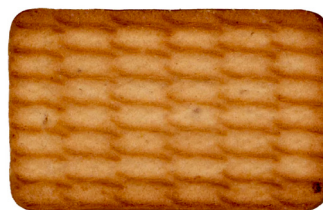
The spot where I spent the least amount of time was the 'Indian' shelf, a subsection to the larger South Asian pantry. Usually, I could count the offerings on my fingertips - *masoor dal*, *toor dal*, *basmati rice*, a brand selling spices from India, an American Indian-condiment brand, and some ready to eat *chicken tikka masala*, *saag paneer* and *dal tadka*. It wasn't just about the lean offering; it was about the reflection of a cuisine on a global scale.

One cannot blame an American store for not having staples from every subcontinent, but one can evaluate the understanding of a certain cuisine by perusing the shelves. These empirical insights made writing a dissertation on street food stalls in India (specifically, Jaipur) more complicated.

How does one take on the responsibility of translating foods to readers without making them taste it first? Anyone who has eaten a *pani puri* would know that its description as 'fried but airy balls of dough, perfectly punctured to make holes on top, revealing the hollow inside, filled with aloo, moong, or chana and doused in sweet, spicy water' doesn't do enough to make the reader ravenous.

Translating and articulating this allows the reader to embark on a journey of empathy, and thus, uplift. However, this occupies unnecessary space—offering linguistic explanations that can only be understood experientially. My research encapsulated commensality (the act of eating together) as a way to unpack street food stalls as wall-less, crowded, provisional spaces. They enable a form of accidental commensality: an unexpected and unconstructed method of eating together. The questions that I was asked were mostly...

*“Isn't it dirty
to eat on
the streets?”*



*“Oh, don't
you get sick?”*

I mostly understood the cynicism, but the point of my exploration was far from the concerns of hygiene—it was observing these eating spaces as ecosystems of communal eating, where people of varied classes, castes, and religions gathered to share a meal.

Then, translating ‘how one would ‘feel’ standing in front of a heritage property in Jaipur, made completely out of white marble while consuming a plate of pav bhaji’ in words is an injustice to the experience. The way we talk about food matters— it reinforces positionality. But, the fact that words on their own cannot depict the depth of the experience does not inherently matter.

What matters is holding onto practices that make the food we eat inherently tough to translate. My thesis, a 12000 word draft, might not have translated the joy of eating on the street. Hence, I set up a chai stall in the middle of our college campus on RISD beach. A stretch of grass, uphill and open from all sides, became the perfect spot for pedestrians to stop by and have a cup of masala chai with Parle-G.

I couldn’t express the idea of ‘street food as democratized spaces of eating’ in words, so I tried to demonstrate it.

reconfigure

Written by Aanya Arora
Designed by Sejal Gupta

What do all these things have in common?

One may think of these objects as 'waste,' having fulfilled their purpose and now destined for disposal. However, from a South Asian perspective, these objects still possess value and should not be discarded prematurely. They are in a constant flux in a South Asian household. An old bucket finds a new life as a makeshift trash can, plastic bags transform into trash bags, and worn towels are repurposed from bathing to cleaning tools. Material objects are constantly rebranded, re-shuffled, reused, purely out of necessity, making South Asian lifecycles inherently sustainable.

It may sound far-fetched, but this turnover of materials is similar to the cyclical life of plants.

Plants follow a five-stage cycle

1. Germination
2. Growth
3. Harvest
4. Decomposition
5. Absorption

Similar to the plant cycle and the repeated use of products in South Asian households, the material cycle reflects the necessity of continually reintegrating materials into the production cycle. This approach allows us to engage with existing materials, fostering sustainability and enhancing the resilience of our built environment. Duncan Baker-Brown relates this approach in 'The Re-Use Atlas' and discusses the *tabula plena* approach, where our environment is perpetually abundant, and its 'tablet' can never be wiped clean. Rather, the wealth of available materials must be creatively repurposed to reconfigure the spaces inhabited by us.

Our environment undergoes constant transformation. As artists and designers, it is our responsibility to envision and shape the future. In order to achieve this, the negative idea of waste must be dismantled. Traditionally, waste has been perceived as material devoid of value, which has outlived its usefulness and is disposable. However, this perspective fails to acknowledge the inherent potential of every material. Rather than perceiving these materials to be at the end of their life, they should be acknowledged to be at the harvest stage of the material cycle. These materials are waiting to be rescued from landfills. A new world of possibilities, where discarded items are transformed into valuable resources, can arise by embracing the idea that no material is truly waste. This shift in mindset underscores the importance of adopting sustainable practices that prioritize the repurposing and reuse of materials, minimizing waste, and maximizing resource efficiency.



Skincare Bottle



Paper Cup



Plastic Bucket



Cookie Box



Cotton Saree



Plastic Water Bottle



Shoe Box



Newspaper



Egg Carton



Plastic Bag



Parchment Paper



Plastic Wrap



Rubber Bands



Plastic To-Go Container

In New Delhi, India, waste pickers are actively challenging the negative perception surrounding waste. These resilient and industrious women scour households across the city to salvage reusable materials. Engaged in a daily process, they meticulously collect, sort, categorize, and sell these

materials. For instance, The Chintan Environmental Research and Action Group collaborates with waste pickers to transform waste through craftsmanship. The resultant products not only contribute to income generation, but also exert a positive influence on their livelihoods.

Through biomimicry, we can emulate the plant life cycle system and use it as a framework to solve the complex waste problem that our

society is facing. The cycle outlined below demonstrates the principles of the circular economy within building construction.

Germination Construct raw building materials by selecting natural materials from the earth, such as wood, stone, clay, metals, or composites. Materials undergo a process of refinement, where they are combined with other elements or transformed. The material's inherent properties and characteristics are harnessed to fulfill specific structural, functional, and aesthetic requirements.

Growth Integrate building components into construction. Realize an architectural vision, where the collective efforts of architects, engineers, builders, and craftsmen allow the materials to grow in situ.

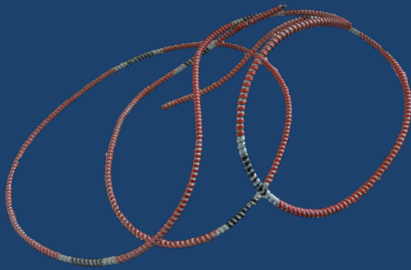
Harvest Collect and salvage materials from the construction site. Depart from conventional demolition practices where old building materials are discarded. Embody the ethos of the cradle-to-cradle approach, where materials are kept in circulation for as long as possible, reducing waste and minimizing environmental impact.

Decomposition Disassemble the building components. When structures reach the end of their lifecycle or undergo renovation, carefully separate salvagable materials. Assess materials for quality and purity and ensure they can be repurposed effectively in their subsequent life cycles.

Absorption Collaborate with designers, engineers, and craftsmen to recognize each material's characteristics and work to explore innovative ways of aggregation to form composite structures. Instead of solely relying on a single material, depart from conventional construction methods towards heterogeneous approaches that embrace the diversity of available materials.

Embracing 'urban mining' has involved regularly scouring scrap yards and visiting recycling centers such as the Inner City Recycling Service, Berger

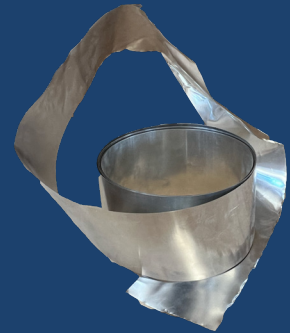
Recycling, and the Rhode Island Resource Recovery Center. Among the growing array of materials in the collection are:



Copper and Steel Wire



2 x 4 Offcuts



Metal Sheet Roll



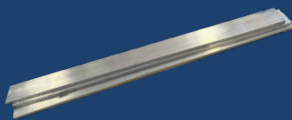
Corrugated Pipe Connectors



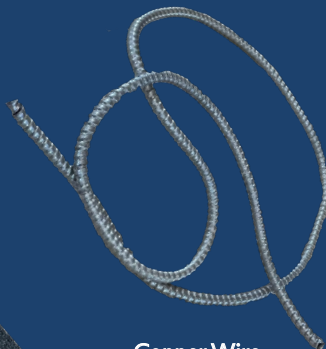
Perforated Metal Sliding



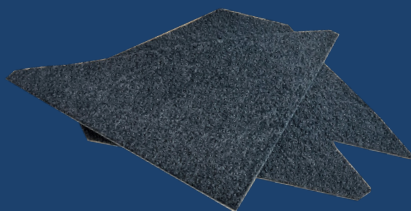
CMU Blocks



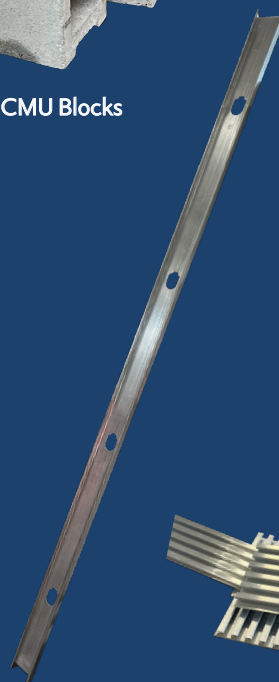
Aluminium Bars



Copper Wire



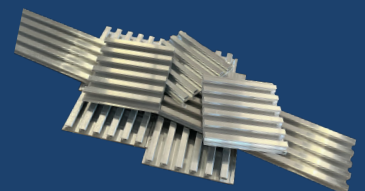
Carpet Off-Cuts



Metal Beam Piece



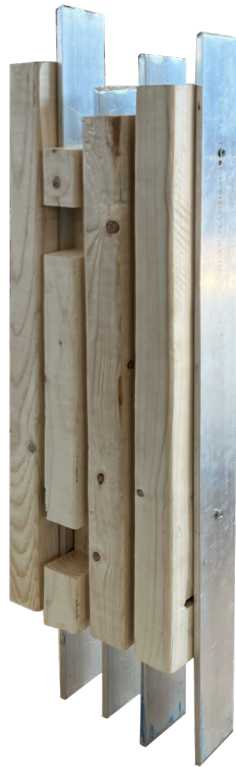
Metal Slot Pieces



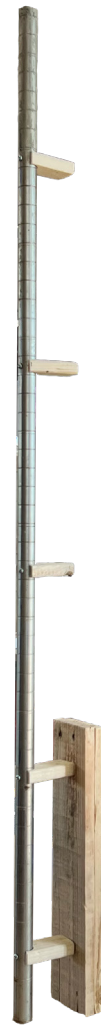
Metal Sliding Pieces



Door Infill and Handles



Wall Lamination



Door Handle

This practice of salvaging materials prompts a critical examination of societal notions of progress. Consumerist ideology has long equated economic growth with the incessant production and consumption of goods and services. In the past, analysts in the retail sector have expressed that there is a continual need for items to be consumed, used up, replaced, and disposed of at an increasingly rapid pace. This idea ignores the interplay between capitalism and sustainability. *How can we responsibly consume while still carving a path for future generations?*

Drawing inspiration from the resourcefulness of South Asian traditions can redefine our concept of growth. Utilizing existing materials can forge innovative pathways to progress that prioritize sustainability and mindful resource management.

Within the building construction field, each generation leaves its imprint, embracing current materials such as stone, steel, glass, or concrete. This is labeled as 'progress'. The building industry contributes nearly 40% of world emissions; hence, the need for a radical (re)-configuration within the building industry is more pressing than ever before.



Door Double Collage



Door Frame

Situated in Providence, Rhode Island, USA, the (re)-material project adapts the waste pickers methodology to building construction in local contexts. (re)-material is centered around how to take this thinking and apply it to the construction industry in New England. Drawing inspiration from the life cycle of plants, the methodologies of waste pickers, and the rich material culture of South Asia, we can actively engage in a process of deconstructing, categorizing, and aggregating materials.

As artists and designers, we can curtail the volume of waste destined for landfills by creatively recombining materials. We can unlock opportunities for sustainable innovation by rethinking the material cycle. We must collectively collaborate across cultures and draw inspiration from diverse perspectives, to jointly address the urgent climate challenges and resource depletion. Through innovation, creativity, and a commitment to sustainability, we can pave the way for a brighter and more sustainable future for generations to come.

There's Gotta Be A Way

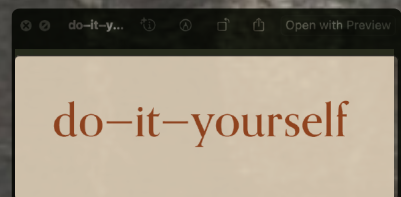
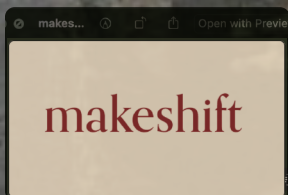
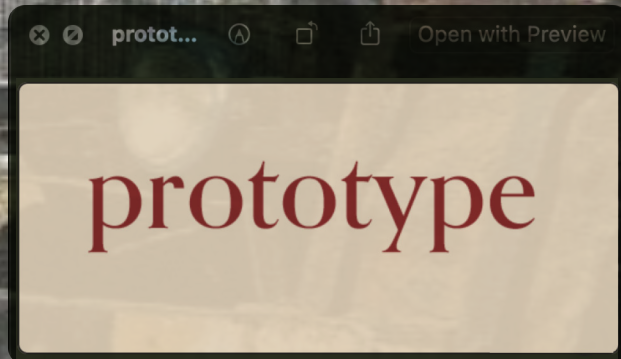
*Written by Harsh Thakkar
Designed by Radhika Chauhan*



Iska
Kuch
Jugaad
Hoga



Jugaad is Global





craft

quick-fix

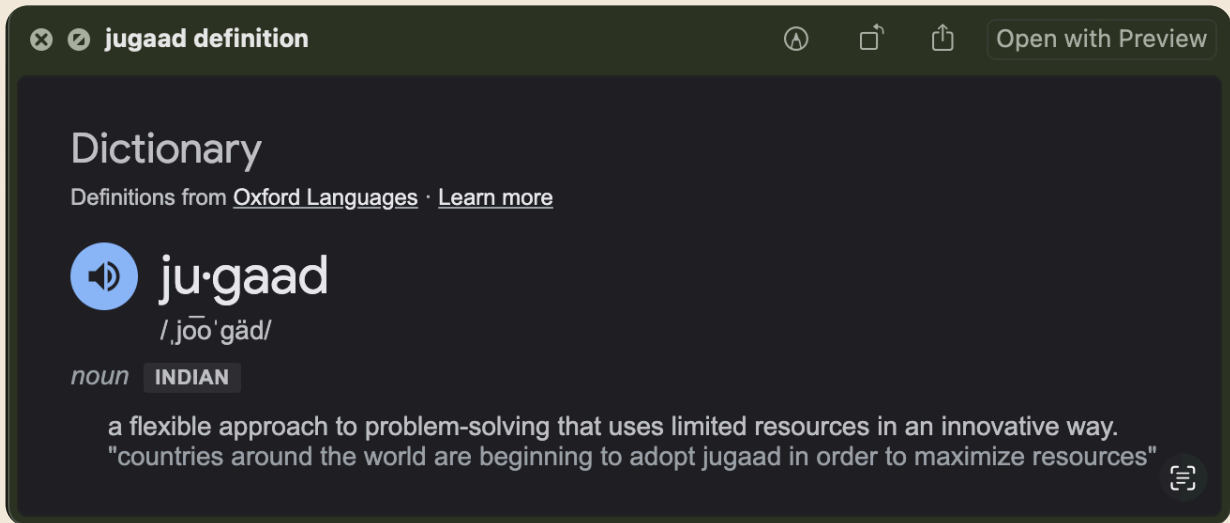
intuitive

compromise

improvisation

kludging

Jugaad is a Craft



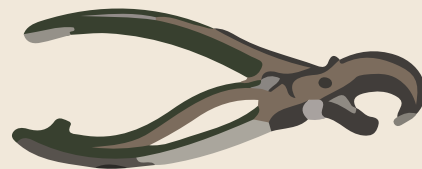
Jugaad, a form of a form formed out of impromptu ingenuity, experimentation, innovation, frugality, lack of resources, time constraint, or simple laziness.

Slightly deviating from the aforementioned truthful and encompassing definition of *jugaad*, Google roots it particularly in ‘Indian-ness,’ by reflecting its origination in India. It mentions that other countries are “beginning to adopt jugaad.”



It classifies the word solely as a noun and thus, describes it as an object, a product. Limiting the definition of jugaad to a form of problem-solving, and every other factor pointed out above begins to create an overarching limitation to how it should be interpreted as: as merely a concept. The origins of jugaad lie in the northern region of India. In the 90s, the concept of jugaad was used to refer to improvised, innovative vehicles built with limited resources that subverted the requirements of ordinary vehicles and provided a more affordable, though temporary version.

Examples of these transformations include autorickshaws constructed out of a regular two-wheeled motorbike, or external roofs attached to motorbikes in order to produce a prototype of a car. Such vehicles were extremely popular in North India, and slowly expanded to the rest of the country in the late 90s. Despite these examples dating back roughly by half a century, borne out of ‘innovation’ and ‘improvisation,’ jugaad can be described as a concept of creating temporary mechanisms. Ideally, it is an umbrella term that encapsulates forms of making combined with resourcefulness.



When we talk about ‘making,’ we discuss topics like upcycling, recycling, craft, and DIY

(do-it-yourself), ‘craft’ being one in particular. Social connotations of jugaad relate to the general understanding of the concept of ‘craft.’ Craft is often described as an activity which employs skilled handiwork. Jugaad is also often produced through physical applications of hand skills. In this case, there is a fine distinction drawn between craft and jugaad—craft requires the final result to have a particular aesthetic sense, but for jugaad, the primary aspects are tactility and functionality.

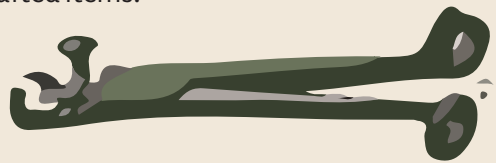


Craft is an expansive subject, yet its intersection with the concept of jugaad can be critically debated. In India, multiple activities which require skills as well as resourcefulness, juggle between being on either side of such a convergence. Trivial objects such as kitchen utensils, footwear, and electronic gadgets form a huge part of our daily lives. Upon moments of failure of these objects, the instantaneous solutions found by repairers, cobblers, and electricians respectively, are either due to a lack of time, resources, or both.

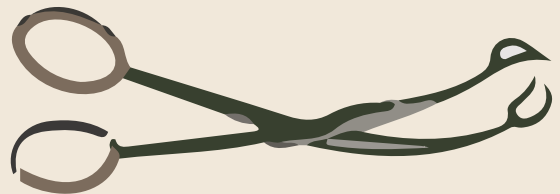


The niche skills employed here, can be characterized as skilled craftsmanship, and its tactility and functionality can be characterized as jugaad. Due to such a crossroad, its interpretation remains subjective to every individual’s thought process. *Karigari*, also known as ‘craftsmanship,’ is a term that entails a general perspective upon the people working a job that requires an extremely niche skill set. *Karigars* (craftsmen) apply a methodological and pragmatic process in the making of an object. India is a place with an incredible history of craftsmanship.

Over time, due to the excessive presence of craftsmanship, craft became an excessively available commodity, and hence, due to its relatively cheaper access, it started being referred to as ‘cheap labor.’ Often referred to as ‘craftsmen’ i.e. people working in the crafts industry, the term *karigar* gradually dissolved into the description of manual labor. I contend that there was a rise in the production of jugaadu objects due to the increasingly glorified presence of the craft industry. Such objects deduced skilled craftsmanship, and instead employed improvisation and ingenuity to produce alternates of expertly crafted items.



It is important to note that the concept of jugaad continued prolifically through the emergence of craft practices in India. Both craft as well as jugaad play a crucial role in developing the identity of India. The wave of innovations in the beginning of the twenty-first century in India, has led to the emergence of ‘jugaad culture.’ It is embedded into our way of living. Discussions of expanse can be further proposed here, revolving around jugaad or craft’s accessibility to people, and the multiple levels of society it is consciously or subconsciously practiced in. To consider jugaad as a resource revolutionizes it as a method observed between every individual’s daily existence, and inserts it beyond the realm of craft.



If craft is an innovation through handiwork, then jugaad is at the root of the innovation; a prototype form of craft which uses minimum skill and maximum ingenuity.

Jugaadu innovation is extended to ‘start-up culture’ as well. Upon the emergence of electric scooters in India, there was a start-up which introduced battery banks for charging a scooter, to grapple with lack of facilities to charge scooters faced by the customer median of electric scooters. The lack of resources can be termed as the root of the problem, and the solution which originated from lack of resources can be termed as a jugaadu. Heading back and highlighting the veiled problem with Google’s definition of jugaad and its categorical classification, it is conspicuous that it is a noun, as well as an adjective. Google’s classification of jugaad as a noun is surpassed into an adjectival relevance when describing something as jugaadu. It is an emotion used to describe the ingenuity rooted in the minds of people not only in India, but other parts of the world. The claim on Google: “countries around the world are beginning to adopt jugaad,” is undeniably relevant in how jugaad is being practiced by a variety of individuals in many places around the world. In both tangible and intangible ways, jugaad, or its global translations of makeshift, upcycling, kludging, or more, are ubiquitous.

Jugaad is a Mindset

As South Asians, the jugaadu perspective innately exists in everyone, and is carried forward to functioning of daily life no matter what region one migrates to, for any kind of purpose. It is both explicitly and implicitly ejected upon in many forms by South Asians. Examples such as the use of a *chappal* (flip-flops) as a door binder is not exclusive to South Asians, but rather every individual at some point in their life. To use a suitcase as a stand for a projector rather than borrowing it from a media center exemplifies jugaadu functionality. To others it might be easier to borrow a functional object, but for us it is often a more difficult job. It is easier to find a quick-fix solution ourselves, and that is a testament to our impulse to innately find the jugaadu solution in all we do. We are wired to find a way out of things ourselves, without resorting to outsider help. Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions proposes that societies are either individualistic or collectivistic. In the former, people care only for themselves, and in the latter, people care for the larger group, with the collective in mind. Many parts of South Asia are considered to be collectivistic societies, though when it comes to defining jobs and doing certain jobs, we are all individualistic.

It’s the joy of achieving it individually that propels our actions in a certain direction.


Background Images

Page 60: An example of a jugaad approach of using a plastic bottle to connect a tap for waterflow.

Page 62: A jugaad improvised vehicle.

Page 66: A go-kart built with scrap materials.

Image Credits: Garnet Hertz



"Innovation through impromptu experimentation" or "Compromise to create something that would work temporarily" are some statements that can be used to describe jugaad. How would you personally define the concept of jugaad briefly in a single statement?

Yukti V. Agarwal

Maybe even this idea of operable

Someone who does work ?

So you know when there's cheap quality stuff being sold, it's referred to as "chalu samaan". Do you know what "chalu" stands for in that case? Like where does it originate from?

One definition I am thinking of is chalu = cunning, and since often, cheap quality stuff employs ingenuity in terms of 'jugaad', it's referred to as chalu.

Yukti V. Agarwal

Those people who have ingenuity

Sejal Gupta

like mixing two languages maybe

Siya Girdhar

cunning, yes, but also when someone mentions cheap quality stuff being sold i think of "sasta and tikao" something that's widely used in India - it not only refers to it being inexpensive but also tikao shows that regardless of what and how the product is it works in terms of "jugaad" which also unfolds this idea of a hack

Himangi Kanoi

Quick problem solving with accessible resources

Himangi Kanoi

Can't call it an alternative to convenience

Definitely a Segway to convenience

Glossary

Aamras

Sweet mango pulp

Aangan

Courtyard

Aanvala

Myrobalan seed paste

Aasmaani

Sky Blue

Abhla

Mirror

Ajrakh fabric

A naturally printed and dyed fabric

Akho

Fully embroidered

Akuri

Parsee scrambled eggs

Badaami

Almond-like

Bagh

Garden

Bandhani

A tie and dye technique, commonly practiced in the North West Indian states of Gujarat and Rajasthan

Bandhavanu

Meaning 'to tie' in Gujarati

Bansuriwala

Flute seller

Bhoori

Brown

Chaandi

Silver metal

Chandan

Sandalwood

Chapaai kaarigar

Block printers

Chappal

Footwear

Charbagh

A congregation of four gardens

Choya Nakh

A perfume which never makes an appearance in Sanskrit literature, is a sea-shell scent, indicative of a loose woman

Dal Makhani

A dish simmered for hours with buttery, creamy lentils, and aromatic spices

Dhaani Chunariya

A green long scarf worn in South Asia

Dhansak

A stew made with lentils, vegetables, and meat

Dhol

A traditional Punjabi drum

Dhoosar

Ash grey

Diwali

The Hindu festival of lights

Dosh

Defect or flaw

Eentie

Brick-like

Gandharva

Divine artists

Garbagriha

A central chamber housing the deity of the temple

Garo

Width which refers to unstitched lengths of embroidered silk worn as saris by Parsi women

Ghatam

Clay pot with a narrow mouth

Ghazal

A form of poetry

Gopurams

Can be described as gateways that appear above entrances in stone-cut temples in South India

Gulaabi

Rose-like

Gulaal

Bright powdered colors playfully smeared on each other's faces

Haldi

Turmeric

Hindustani

Combination language of Hindi and Urdu

Holi

The kaleidoscopic festival of colors

Ikat

Malay-Indonesian expression 'mangikat,' meaning to bind, knot, or wind around

Ispaati

Steel grey

Jalebi

Indian sweet dish similar to funnel cake

Jhummar

Chandelier

Jugaad

A form of a form formed by impromptu ingenuity, experimentation, innovation, frugality, lack of resources, a lack of time constraint, or dormancy

Jugaadu

Adjective form of Jugaad

Khaddar

Off-white cotton usually spun, woven, and dyed locally

Khakee

Light tan brown

Khubani

Apricot

Mala

Fragrant flower garlands

Mandala

Literally translates to 'circle' in Sanskrit

Manjitha

Madder root

Mela

Carnival

Moonga

Coral

Mohanthal

An Indian sweet with a fluffy mix of flour and ghee leaving a velvet aftertaste that melts in the mouth

Moti

Pearl white

Neela

Blue

Odhani

Head scarf

Paan Bhat

Leaf

Parathas

Stuffed bread

Patt

Silk floss yarn

Patra Ni Macchi

Fish fillets marinated in a coconut and herb paste, wrapped in banana leaves

Peelak

Yellowish

Phulkari

Phul (flower) and kari (work)

Pipal

Sacred Fig

Prana

Sanskrit word for ‘vital force’ or the life-sustaining energy of all beings

Pukhraaj

Topaz stone

Puri

Soft and greasy bread

Rakta Laal

Blood red

Rang de Basanti

Colour me saffron

Rangavli

‘Rang’ means colour and ‘avalli’ means row or line

Rangoli

The art of designing stylized or geometric patterns on the ground using gulaal, rice or flower petals

Rangrez

Dyer or colourist

Roopahala

Silver-like

Safed

White

Saletti

Slate grey

Sali Boti

Lamb curry with potato

Sari

A women’s garment from the Indian subcontinent

Shastra

‘Science’ or ‘scientific treatment of a subject’

Shikhara

Mountain peak in Sanskrit

Shyaam

Dark blue

Sindoor

Vermillion

Surti Undhiyu

A traditional Gujarati dish made out of a mix of fresh vegetables, fenugreek dumplings, and subtle spices

Siyaahi

Ink

Tabula Plena

An approach where our environment is perpetually abundant, and its ‘tablet’ can never be wiped clean

Tava

Stove

Tulsi

Holy basil plant

Vastra

A garment, cloth, clothes, or raiment in Sanskrit

Vastu

Dwelling

Vastu Dosh Nivaran

To prevent or to ward off

Vastu Puja

A prayer ceremony

Vastu Purusha

A primordial man that Brahma, the god of creation, made while building the universe

Vastu Shastra

Hindu science of architecture

Vastukars

Vastu practitioners

Vimana

A tower that is similarly terraced above the same central chamber

Yantra

Instruments

Zard

A particular yellow like the Indian Golden Oriole bird

Zari

A type of gold thread used decoratively on Indian clothing

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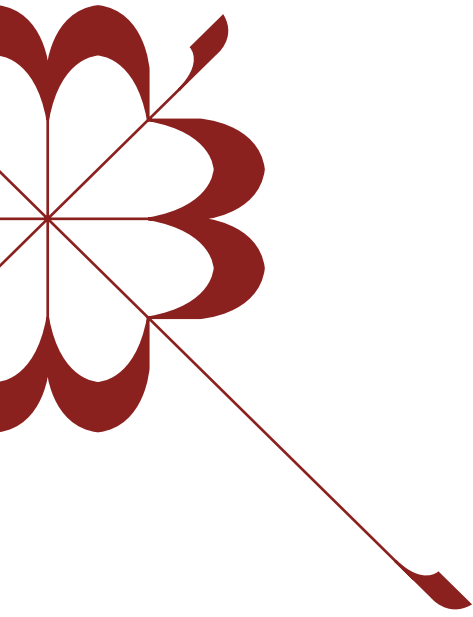
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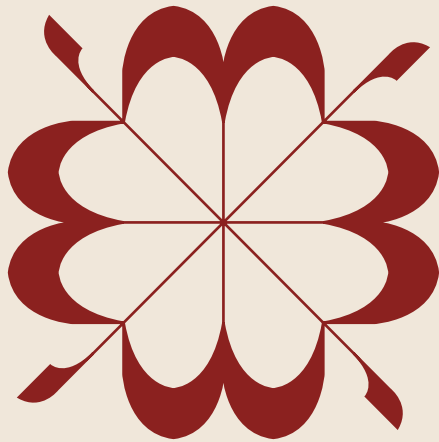
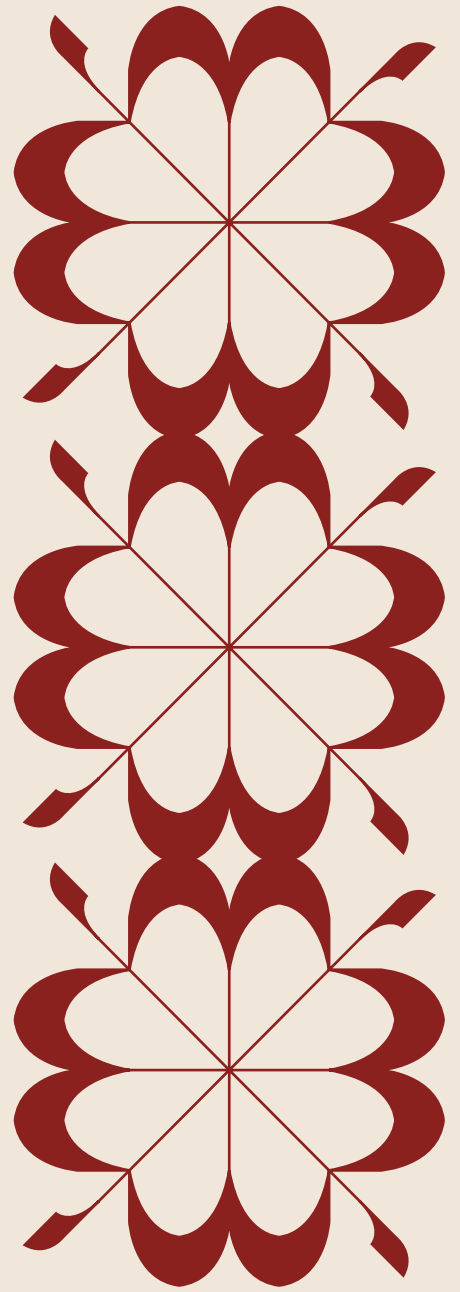
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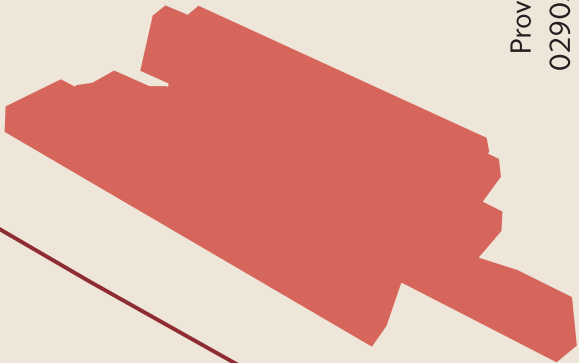
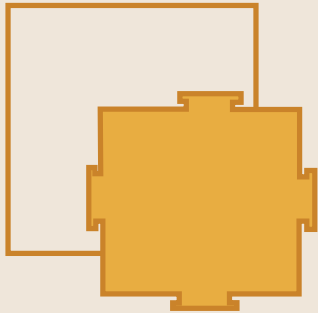
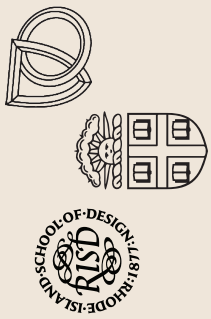


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